GANDHARAN ART AND THE CLASSICAL WORLD

A Short Introduction



Peter Stewart

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Front cover: schist standing figure of the Buddha, c. third century AD. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 67.154.5 (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, CC0 licence).
Back cover: schist relief from a Gandharan monument, c. first to second century AD. Cleveland, OH, Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. 1930.328 (Photo: Cleveland Museum of Art, CC0 licence).
Background image: reverse of a Gandharan schist relief of the Buddha. Cleveland Museum, inv. 1976.152 (CC0 licence).

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Preface

The idea for this book emerged from the Gandhara Connections project at Oxford University's Classical Art Research Centre, which was launched in 2016 with generous funding from the Bagri Foundation and the Neil Kreitman Foundation, and was subsequently also supported by Richard Beleson. The general aim of this initiative was to support and stimulate study and research on an endlessly fascinating and appealing subject: the ancient Buddhist art of the Gandharan region. Our more specific purpose was to cast new light on a question which had puzzled and preoccupied researchers since the earliest studies of Gandharan art in the nineteenth century: why does Gandharan art seem to have drawn so extensively from the art of ancient Greece and Rome?

In the course of its six years the Gandhara Connections project generated a wealth of resources for the study of this subject, including a series of open access volumes of academic papers presented at its annual international workshops, which I edited together with my colleague Wannaporn Rienjang. These resources are permanently available on the project's website (<www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections>). However, one question I was repeatedly asked through the course of the project was: 'What can I read as a short and accessible introduction to Gandharan art?' There was not an easy answer to this question. There are only a few introductions to the subject in any language which are accurate and up-to-date, combining detailed academic information with accessible summary. The conclusion of the Gandhara Connections project therefore seemed a fitting opportunity to write this small volume and to present it in a similar open access format, as well as in print, so that it could reach the widest audience possible.

It cannot claim to be an introduction to every aspect of Gandharan art. As a specialist in Greek and Roman art and archaeology, I am not qualified to write such a survey. The book's focus is the theme of the project itself: the relationship between this Gandharan art and the classical tradition, which is to say, the art traditions of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean, several thousand kilometres to the west. Nevertheless, I have placed some emphasis on explaining Gandharan art to begin with in its own, immediate context. It was, first and foremost, Buddhist, Asian art. It should not be defined by its relationship with the classical world, no matter how intriguing and exciting that connection is.

This book is not intended for one type of reader. It is for anyone and everyone interested in finding out more about Gandharan art. I have attempted to convey information as concisely and clearly as possible. At the same time, I have included in the footnotes selective references to the academic literature that has specifically informed me, or that will permit the reader to find out more. The book concludes with guidance on further reading from the rich bibliography of Gandharan art.

I owe my own understanding of Gandharan art not only to this body of scholarship, but to the friends and colleagues, too numerous to list in full, who have taught me so much in the course of the Gandhara Connections project. The study of Gandharan art is one of the most inclusive and welcoming disciplines I know. Above all I thank Wannaporn Rienjang, who sustained Gandhara Connections throughout as part-time Project Coordinator and Project Consultant, Stefan Baums, Kurt Behrendt, Shailendra Bhandare, Robert Bracey, Pia Brancaccio, Joe Cribb, Elizabeth Errington, Anna Filigenzi, David Jongeward, Rafiullah Khan, Christian Luczanits, Lolita Nehru, Luca M. Olivieri, Jessie Pons, Juhyung Rhi, Abdul Samad, Martina Stoye, and Yang Juping. Luca M. Olivieri generously commented on the manuscript from Barikot and Sarah Knights Johnson cast a critical eye over the proofs. I must record my particular gratitude to Andrew Wong, whose advice crystalized the concept of this book in my mind and improved the final text, and to the Bagri Foundation, whose generosity and enthusiasm have enabled it to come to fruition.

Peter Stewart
Classical Art Research Centre, Oxford
September, 2023

Chapter 1

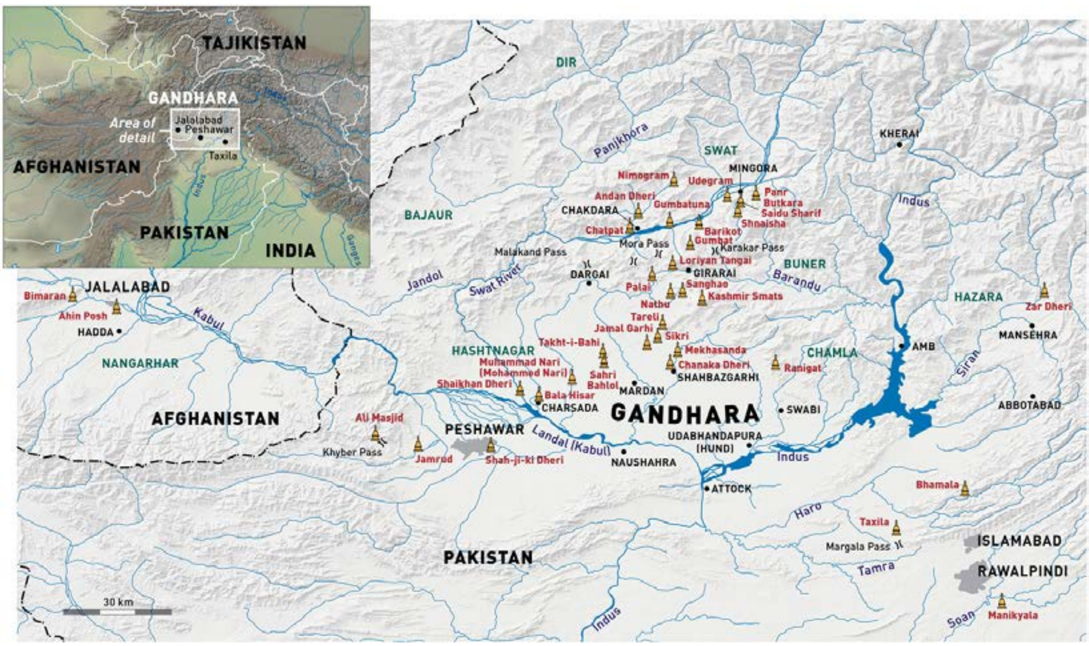
What is Gandharan Art?

Introducing Gandhara

In the northern part of what is today Pakistan, not very far from the capital, Islamabad, a low-lying basin of land is created by the rivers Kabul and Indus and their tributaries (Figure 1). It is cradled by highlands: the Cherat Hills to the south and in other directions the mountains of Kashmir and the edges of the Hindu Kush. On the west side, near the city of Peshawar, the Khyber Pass leads into Afghanistan. This region is not very extensive – no more than about 125 kilometres at its widest point – but it has a disproportionate reputation in the history of ancient art.

This was the area called Gandhara in ancient sources.[1] The term is not a precise one. Even in antiquity it had differing associations. Today it is frequently used to refer to 'Greater Gandhara', a wider region with shared artistic and cultural characteristics, which includes the Swat

Figure 1. Map showing the locations of some of the major Gandharan sites of the Peshawar Valley.



[1] Zwalf (1996), 11, 17 n. 1; Pons (2019), 7.

Valley (ancient Uddiyana) just to the north, the city of Taxila and other areas to the south and south-east, and parts of Afghanistan and Kashmir.[2]

Gandhara has multiple claims to fame, but its art has attracted attention in modern times for two particular reasons. It is, firstly, fascinating and complex on its own terms. In the early centuries AD, this region saw an explosion in religious art which is best attested today by many thousands of sculptures and sculptural fragments carved in the local stone (known as schist or phyllite) or modelled and moulded in clay or stucco.[3] These works were produced in the service of Buddhism, following precedents already established at the great Buddhist sites of India, but they differ from earlier Indian art in their styles and imagery and in the sheer scale of production.[4] Gandharan art offers an extraordinary insight into the development of ancient Buddhism and the values, beliefs, and knowledge of those who commissioned and made it. In time, Gandharan art would come to have an immense influence on the later evolution of Buddhist art right across Asia.

But the reputation of Gandharan art is due to another factor: its arresting and puzzling connection with the art traditions of far distant parts of the ancient world, and more specifically the classical art of the Greeks and the Roman Empire. For reasons that are still not fully understood, the artists of Gandhara appear to have drawn either directly or indirectly upon artistic ideas developed several thousand kilometres to the west, finding in the conventions of Graeco-Roman art ideas that suited their own purposes. When Gandharan art was rediscovered in the nineteenth century, particularly by soldiers and officials of the British Empire who were familiar with Graeco-Roman history and art, these Europeans were astonished by the western affinities of their Gandharan finds. The resemblance was attributed to the legacy of the Macedonian Greek king Alexander the Great, who had conquered Gandhara in 326 BC, and also to the Greek kings who succeeded him in ruling over parts of Central Asia.[5]

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[2] Pons (2019), 4-11 on the problems of naming and the term 'Greater Gandhara'.

[3] On the materials of Gandharan sculpture see: Errington and Cribb (1992), 241-87. 'Stucco' is used here to mean lime/gypsum plaster. On polychromy (the application of colour to sculptures) see: Talarico *et al.* (2015); Pannuzi (2019); Lluveras-Tenorio *et al.* (2022).

[4] The influential production of Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) – discussed further below – and the early sculptures of Sanchi and Bharhut (in north India) and Amaravati (in the south) are often regarded as prominent precedents for Gandharan Buddhist art. Generally on Mathura: Sharma (1984); Quintanilla (2007). Bharhut: Cunningham (1879). Sanchi: Marshall (1918). Amaravati: Shimada and Willis (2016). Revisionist arguments about their dates might place them not long before the earliest Gandharan sculpture: Asher (2006); Kumar (2014); Lo Muzio (2018).

[5] On the discovery of Gandharan art see Chapter 2.

Today, this cross-cultural influence is still one of the main attractions of Gandharan art for those who study or admire it, but the nature of the influence is the subject of debate. Was it really the result of an ancient Greek presence in the region? Or was it due to contemporary contacts with the Roman Empire in the first to third centuries AD? Or is the 'western' character of Gandharan art merely exaggerated? We shall return shortly to these important questions, but let us begin by surveying Gandharan art in its own domain, leaving aside for the moment the issue of foreign influence.

The Accidents of Survival

It should be acknowledged from the outset that the archaeological record of Gandhara is deceptive. In many other parts of the world, the archaeology of historical periods has traditionally been dominated by the more substantial kinds of remains: cities and settlements, cemeteries where the dead were buried with grave-goods and memorials; inscribed monuments, temples and religious complexes. The bias towards the more durable and 'interesting' remains has only gradually been counteracted in recent decades, by surveys of the ancient landscape, for example. The same situation applies to Gandharan archaeology, but the gaps in

Figure 2. Aerial view of the Sirkap site at Taxila, looking south.



coverage are even greater. Remarkably, we know hardly anything about the burials of the Gandharan dead.[6] We have minimal understanding of their houses and towns or villages – only selective research on the great cities of Taxila (the Sirkap site) near Islamabad and Pushkalavati (near Charsadda), although much information from later excavations at Bazira (Barikot) in Swat.[7] We have a few texts to help us, particularly in the form of unprovenanced manuscripts and inscriptions on portable objects written in the Gandhari language, but we have far fewer ancient inscriptions than survive from some other ancient cultures. The patchy picture that results is the consequence both of ancient practices (such as the use of perishable mudbrick for building) and of the past preferences of excavators and researchers. It is also due to the modern destruction of sites, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 3.

Against this rather unpromising background, one particular kind of site has acquired an amplified importance: the shrines and monasteries built by the Buddhist population of Gandhara. For most of the first three centuries AD, Gandhara was an important part of the Kushan Empire, which at its height extended across Central Asia and northern India. It was connected to other parts of this realm, and it also appears to

The ancient city of Taxila was on the south-eastern edge of Gandhara, but it was evidently one of the most important cities of the region. In antiquity its fame extended to the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean (indeed, the modern name Taxila is the Greek form of the Indian name Takshashila). The most extensive excavations were carried out between 1913 and 1930 by John Marshall, the British Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India. He uncovered much of the site known as Sirkap. Marshall thought that the more or less regular grid of streets and the stone wall surrounding the site betrayed its origin as a Hellenistic Greek foundation. However, this is questionable and, in any case, the visible remains probably date to no earlier than the first century BC. The Taxila area is rich in Buddhist sites, and Sirkap itself has structures that might be Buddhist, including a substantial building with an apse (visible to the left of the central street in the photograph). It had declined, however, by the heyday of Gandharan stone sculpture, ultimately being superseded by the nearby town of Sirsukh. Today the ruins of Taxila are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

[6] Note De Marco (1987); Bakker (2007), esp. 17-43; Olivieri (2019) for rare material evidence in Swat.

[7] Taxila: Marshall (1951); Dani (1986); Erdosy (1990) on the dating problems. Pushkalavati (Shaikan Dheri): Dani (1965-6); Petrie (2013). Barikot and urban archaeology in general: Olivieri (2021).

have been well connected to more distant regions of the ancient world through trade, religion and diplomatic contacts. Gandhara – or at least a part of its population – seems to have prospered in these peaceful conditions. We do not know what proportion of its inhabitants could be called Buddhists, but adherents and supporters were sufficiently numerous and affluent to fund the monuments and monastic complexes uncovered by archaeology. The religion of the Kushan rulers themselves seems to have been mainly Shaivite and Zoroastrian, but they also patronized Buddhism.[8]

The wealthy patrons of Buddhism in Gandhara were presumably largely responsible for financing residences and working buildings of the monasteries, and for the stupas, large and small – the dome-like shrines built to contain precious relics of the Buddha and serve as a focus of contemplation and worship. To create such constructions, alongside other acts of piety, was to generate good *karma* – a balance of merit which, it was believed, would pay dividends in the donors' lives, and more particularly in future incarnations.[9] The donors were converting worldly wealthy into spiritual capital. The fact that the creation of durable, stone-built monuments was especially costly and meritorious explains why Buddhist remains have such a dominant place is our surviving evidence. This was also the context for most of the Gandharan art that survives. The majority of the works illustrated in this book are sculptures made for stupas and other shrines.

We have some examples of portable Gandharan artefacts and art in other media as well. Notable among these are the so-called 'palettes' or 'toilet-trays': small, decorated dishes, usually carved in stone, which may, in fact, have been used for libations (ritual wine-offerings) (Fig. 3).[10] Later on we also have some evidence for portable Buddhist shrines.[11] Occasionally we catch glimpses of perishable art-forms such as wall-painting[12] and textiles,[13] and we have some small precious objects such as engraved

[8] For Kushan religion see Rosenfield (1967), *passim*; Grenet (2015). For the Kushan world in general: Bracey, Cribb and Morris (forthcoming).
[9] Fussman (1986), esp. 44-5; Zwalf (1996), 20-22. Unlike other parts of ancient India, Gandhara is relatively lacking in donors' inscriptions, so the organization of patronage both by monks/nuns and lay-people is rather obscure.
[10] Francfort (1979); Falk (2010). The context is not principally Buddhist. The dishes' dating is problematic, but they were probably made from around the first century BC onwards and appear to imitate dishes made in late Hellenistic/Roman Egypt: Lo Muzio (2011); Endreffy (2020) for comparisons.
[11] Hameed (2017); Hameed and Bukari (2021); Koizumi (2000). The dates of such objects are very uncertain but often considered relatively late in the Gandharan tradition.
[12] Lo Muzio (2012a); Lo Muzio (2012b).
[13] E.g. Marshak and Grenet (2008), 947-60 with response by P. Bernard, 960-3. See Inayat

seal-stones and even gold jewellery (Fig. 4).[14] Overwhelmingly, however, the works of art sufficiently durable to survive consist of architectural decorations.



Figure 3. So-called 'palette' or 'toilet-tray' in steatite, from Akra Mound, Bannu, c. first to second century AD. It is decorated with the classical iconography of the myth of Artemis and Aktaeon.

The Buddhist Contexts of Gandharan Sculpture

The word 'decorations' does not do justice to these works of art. They were certainly used to adorn the stupas and make them look appropriately beautiful and admirable, but they were also rich in Buddhist symbolism and had an active role in religious ritual.

Stupas were domed structures in stone, typically at the heart of a monastic complex (Figs. 5 and 6).[15] In Gandhara they were conceived as reliquary shrines. In a sense they were funerary memorials commemorating the life and death of the Buddha or other sanctified figures, giving them a physical presence for worshippers, and indeed physical relics of the Buddha could be interred deep within them in special containers (Fig. 7).[16] The relics might take the form of bodily remains (ashes or bones), or objects such as coins, precious or semi-precious stones, pearls, rings, coral beads, and gold ornaments – tiny deposits charged with sacred significance. Stupas probably originated in the north of the Indian subcontinent before the third century BC.[17] Some of the Gandharan monuments were of vast proportions and were constructed



Figure 4. Carnelian intaglio (carved seal-stone) showing Herakles. Found in Afghanistan and believed to have been made there, c. first to third century AD.

and Rafique (2017) for iconographic evidence (which should be used with caution).

[14] Seals: Callieri (1997); Rahman and Falk (2011) (mainly material from a private collection). Jewellery: Fabrègues (1991) and Tissot (2002), 85-97 mainly on iconographical evidence.

[15] On stupas see Zwalf (1996), 36-8; Behrendt (2004), 28-33.

[16] See Errington (1998); Brown (2006); Jongeward *et al.* (2012).

[17] Archaeology supports the literary tradition that stupas were in use by the time of King Ashoka (*c.* 304-232 BC). For a recent overview see Coningham (2011), esp. 937-40.

under royal patronage. The 'Kanishka Stupa' at Shah-ji-ki-dheri in Peshawar, attributed in its original form to the patronage of that ruler, was possibly the highest skyscraper in the ancient world (as Huu Phuoc Le describes it). It was perhaps 120 metres high with all its trappings (and the ancient Chinese sources considered it much taller still).[18] The Dharmarajika Stupa at Taxila could have been about 25 metres high.[19] A height of around 10-15 metres was more normal within even large monasteries such as the complex at Takht-i-Bahi and it was also customary for the main stupa, as there, to be accompanied nearby by much smaller, satellite stupas (Fig. 6).[20] The latter were perhaps votives – individually dedicated shrines financed by well-to-do patrons.[21]



Figure 5. Gandharan relief in schist showing monks venerating a stupa, c. second to third century AD.

[18] Le (2010), 179-80.
[19] Le (2010), 173, fig. 6.13.
[20] Le (2010), 56-8; 56, fig. 4.13 (for reconstructed section).
[21] Schopen (1987); Behrendt (2004): 29.





Figure 6. View of the monastery of Takht-i-Bahi, looking north. The square structure in the nearest court is the base of the main stupa; the court immediately beyond became crowded with small stupas.

Figure 7. Steatite reliquary which contained miniature gold reliquaries, a charm, and coins of the Kushan emperor Vima Takto. From a stupa at Darunta, Afghanistan, c. second century AD.

Regardless of the size, the typical form of a Gandharan stupa was consistent. It comprised a domed cylinder on top of a square base. It was approached by a flight of steps. An elaborate 'false gable' might adorn the dome. One of the most striking features of a stupa was its pinnacle in the form of a multi-tiered shaft of superimposed 'parasols' (a *chattravali*). This element, known at best from fragments, could account for much of the height of the monument. Sculptural reliefs were used for embellishing most of the elements mentioned: the sides of the base, the stupa drum, the vertical stair-risers of steps, the false gable, and the *chattravali*.

Some of the reliefs evoked conventional architectural elements or generic ornamentation and indeed architectural motifs were pervasive. For example, so-called 'Corinthian' columns and pilasters surmounted by leafy capitals, which have their ancestry in Graeco-Roman architecture, were frequent, providing punctuation of the various figured scenes (Figs. 8, 22, 29, 31, 38).[22] The scenes were also often divided horizontally by diamond-pattern bands, which probably originated in the representation of laurel garlands. Other kinds of vegetal imagery were abundant. However, for the most part the sculptures represented figural subjects. They included narrative scenes, sometimes of great complexity, and representations of individual figures. The latter included relatively humble supporting figures conventionally called 'Atlantes' (singular: Atlas), as well as important, larger-scale images of the Buddha himself. We will return to both categories of imagery shortly.

Not all sculptures were made to adorn the stupas themselves. Monasteries sometimes developed groups of niches built to hold large sculptures of the Buddha or other venerated figures (visible in the middle of Fig. 6).[23] Smaller, individual shrines may also have existed away from monasteries, in domestic contexts.[24]

All of these sculptures seem to have been brightly painted or gilded. In their modern state the grey, schist sculptures give little hint of the colourful sumptuousness of the monuments, though small traces of gilding and pigment occasionally survive. A more vivid impression is offered by the stucco sculptures, which often retain their polychromy very visibly (Figs. 9, 43).[25]

22 Boardman (1994), 131.
23 Behrendt (2004), esp. 9, 14, 32, 36, 245-7, 268-9.
24 Olivieri and Filigenzi (2018), 71-9.
25 See e.g. Verri *et al.* (2019); Talarico (2015); Pannuzi *et al.* (2019); Lluveras-Tenorio *et al.* (2022).



Figure 8. Schist reliefs from a Gandharan monument (stupa stair-risers?), c. first to second century AD. The scenes show dancing, drinking, and music with figures in varied dress.

This display was the setting for the lives of the monastic community, which included not only Buddhist monks and nuns, but also the lay-people and staff resident in these complexes.[26] Sculptures were also of the utmost importance for donors and worshippers who came from outside.

[26] On new evidence at Takht-i-Bahi see Khan Khattak (2019), 101-3.



Figure 9. Painted and gilded female head in stucco (with partial restorations), found at a Buddhist site at Rokhri, c. second to third century AD.

The monuments were created as acts of piety, but they also served as a focus for devotion and contemplation. A significant act of devotion was *pradakshina* – 'circumambulation' – by which devotees processed around the stupa drum.[27] The sculptures catered for this ritual, notably by presenting images of the Buddha and important scenes from his life along the clockwise circuit of the stupa. The narrative scenes were intended to be 'read' in this direction.[28]

The Image of the Buddha

The Buddha was, of course, central to all of this imagery. Buddhism had its origins among the followers of the historical 'Buddha' ('Enlightened One'), who lived in northern India around the fifth century BC.[29] He was a local prince or aristocrat called Siddhartha Gautama (also often called 'Shakyamuni'), who is believed to have renounced his luxurious lifestyle when he became conscious of suffering in the world, in the form of old age, illness, and death. Having experimented with forms of extreme self-denial and asceticism, he eventually reached enlightenment through meditation and preached a more moderate path of contemplation and right behaviour rather than self-mortification. At the heart of his teachings was the principle that the ultimate liberation from worldly suffering required escaping from the endless cycle of reincarnations (*samsara*). This was to be achieved through the extinction of the soul called *nirvana*.[30]

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27 Zwalf (1996), 31.

28 Taddei (2015), esp. 55-6, 59.

29 Some ancient sources point rather towards the period 566/3-486/3 BC, which has been widely accepted in the past, though most scholarship now favours a later date around 480-400 BC. For an authoritative discussion of the debate see Bechert (1991-7).

30 The literature on Buddhism, ancient and modern, is of course vast. For a wide-ranging and authoritative overview see e.g. Bechert and Gombrich (1984). Note the numerous bibliographic articles under the theme of 'Buddhism' on Oxford Bibliographies <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>, which include material on the Pali canon and other Buddhist texts.

Neither Buddhist religious texts nor images of the Buddha survive from the early centuries of the faith.[31] The *dharma* – the Buddha's body of teachings – was passed down and further elaborated in an oral tradition which was later consigned to writing. This is best known today in the vast body of literature written in Sri Lanka in the Pali language, and known as the Pali Canon. But the stories of the Buddha's life and extensive writings about Buddhist ideas and monastic principles also existed in Gandhara in the period that concerns us. The narrative scenes of Gandharan sculpture often seem to have a close relationship with literature, but there are notable discrepancies and our knowledge of the sources available to artists is sketchy.[32]

By this period differing doctrinal approaches had emerged within the Buddhist community, which by now reached across South and Central Asia. A particular distinction is often made between *Mahayana* ('Great Vehicle') and the older traditions of early Buddhism.[33] The former placed emphasis on the importance of the *bodhisattvas* – spiritually advanced individuals on the path to full buddhahood who had devoted themselves compassionately to helping other living beings. However, it is not easy to link particular kinds of Gandharan imagery to one or other of these traditions, and a spectrum of beliefs seems to have been in circulation in the region, with different conceptions coexisting even within individual monastic communities.[34]

The Buddha was the single most important figure to be represented in Gandharan art (Figs. 10-13, 15-17, 19, 29, 31-2, 34, 36, 58). He was typically depicted as youthful and physically beautiful but without the trappings of wealth or worldly importance (indeed, his elongated earlobes remind the viewer of his relinquished gold earrings). He wears garments that resemble monastic robes. These can be hard to interpret but are usually explained as a long waist-cloth (*antaravasaka*); a long, unfitted tunic (*uttarasanga*); and a cloak-like *sanghati* enveloping most of the

31 On the emergence of Buddha images see below. Aniconism – an aversion to using images of the Buddha – is usually assumed during the early centuries of Buddhism, but for the hypothesis that they existed in perishable materials see e.g. Huntington (1985); Huntington (1990). Note response by Linrothe (1993).

32 See e.g. Malandra (1981). For critical discussion of the general question: Foucher (1905-1951), vol. 1, 616-9. On hypothetical influence of images *on texts* see Malandra (1981), 129; Foucher (1905-1951), vol. 1, 617-9. The *Mahavastu*, the *Lalitavistara* and the *Buddhacharita* of Ashvaghosha are particularly often adduced to explain Gandharan scenes of the Buddha's life.

33 Often loosely labelled with the originally pejorative term 'Hinayana' ('Little Vehicle'). Note Ruegg (2004) on the problems of terminology.

34 On artistic evidence for Mahayana beliefs and practices in Gandhara: Rhi (2003); on recent textual evidence see Allon and Salomon (2010).



body including one or both shoulders.[35] In earlier images he is sometimes shown with a moustache, but this becomes less frequent. On his forehead he has a raised dot known as an *urna* and he has a topknot or *ushnisha*, which has sometimes been regarded as alluding to a cranial protuberance. These were two of the *lakshanas* – the characteristic marks traditionally thought to distinguish the Buddha. His head is invariably backed by a 'nimbus' (halo), a motif which may have its origins in Graeco-Roman depictions of luminous divinities.[36]

The Buddha is usually shown meditating or preaching, or interacting with others in narrative scenes. His hands adopt one of a series of conventional gestures (*mudras*) which symbolize moments in his life: *abhayamudra* (right hand raised in reassurance; Figs. 10, 12 and 13); *dhyanamudra* (seated, meditating with hands laid one on top of the other; Fig. 11, cf. Fig. 58); *dharmachakramudra* (holding thumb and forefinger of left hand to touch the side of the right hand in front of his chest – a gesture associated with preaching the *dharma*; Fig. 19, centre); and *bhumisparshamudra* (left hand flat in the lap, right hand pointing fingers to the ground to call upon the earth to bear witness to his enlightenment; Fig. 34).[37] It should be emphasized that besides this commonly occurring iconography, there was much variety in Buddha representations and considerable blurring of the distinction between the historical Buddha Shakyamuni and other Buddhas (see below). His life before enlightenment was also represented, and one of the most striking and famous Gandharan images portrays him fasting before (or arguably just after) his enlightenment, the emaciated physique in marked contrast to his normal, physically idealized form (Fig. 11).[38]

Figure 10. Small (50.8 cm high) schist standing figure of the Buddha, c. third century AD.

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[35] Zwalf (1996), 40 discusses the uncertainties.

[36] For the repertoire of iconographical elements in such images of the Buddha see e.g. Zwalf (1996), 39-41; Tissot (2002). On the nimbus see Spagnoli (2002).

[37] On the *mudras* see Zwalf (1996), 39-40.

[38] On the fasting Buddha type see Brown (1997); Rhi (2008b), with 131 n. 22 offering



Figure 11. Schist sculpture of the fasting Siddhartha/ Buddha from Sikri, c. second to fourth century AD.

The first explicit representations of the Buddha in human form may have emerged in the first century AD, though some of the candidates for the earliest surviving representation, such as the Bimaran reliquary casket (Fig. 12), are impossible to date securely.[39] They were undoubtedly established by the second century, when the conventional figure of the Buddha even appears on coins of the Kushan king Kanishka (Fig. 13).[40] He also appears in the art of Mathura in northern India, more than 800 kilometres away, so it is unclear whether the idea of portraying the Buddha in sculpture originated in Gandhara or Mathura, or both.[41] What is particularly remarkable about the Gandharan images is that they represent the Buddha in a manner both highly naturalistic (with visually convincing anatomy that is true to life) and at the same time idealized and otherworldly. In this way the sculptures manage to capture his essential humanity, his supramundane physical qualities, and his mental and moral detachment from worldly emotions and impulses, all at the same time. A somewhat similar balance between emotional self-control and aloofness, absence of imperfection and fidelity to physical reality, had been established for centuries in the traditions of Greek and Roman art; this was an idiom with strong ethical connotations that ultimately went back to Classical Greece in the fifth century BC.[42] It was apparently to these traditions that the Gandharan artists turned, representing the Buddha with a youthful, impassive face that strongly recalls and sometimes almost copies Graeco-Roman representations of heroes and

argument against Brown's post-enlightenment interpretation; Behrendt (2010).

[39] Bimaran casket: Zwalf (1996) 348-50, no. 659; 346-7, no. 652 for the context. Cribb (2010) for issues of dating and the history of its study.

[40] Cribb (1984).

[41] On debate over the origins the Buddha image see Cribb (1984); Rhi (2010); DeCaroli (2015); Falser (2015): esp. 15-18.

[42] See e.g. Stewart (1990), 78-81; Hölscher (2004), 47-57 on the Roman values attached to this style.



Figure 12. The Bimaran reliquary casket, c. first century AD. Gold with inlaid garnets; height 6.5 cm. From Bimaran Stupa 2 near Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The gods Brahma and Indra are shown flanking a frontal Buddha who stands in abhayamudra.



Figure 13. Gold coin of the Emperor Kanishka from Ahin Posh near Jalalabad, Afghanistan, c. AD 127-150: reverse showing figure of the Buddha.

gods, notably Apollo, the young god of light, and his divine sister Artemis (Figs. 14 and 15).[43]



Figure 14. Roman marble head of Apollo, probably from a herm, c. first half of second century AD. Formerly in the Lansdowne and William Randolph Hearst collections and formerly thought to represent Artemis.

The Buddha was ubiquitous in Gandharan sculpture.[44] He features in Gandharan narrative reliefs that recounted his life or past lives. He is shown as the recipient of veneration from praying figures. Discrete images of him were also presented in isolation, sometimes on a very large scale and probably intended to be a direct object of contemplation and devotion from visitors to the shrine or stupa. 'Iconic', frontal images of the Buddha remained a prominent feature of Buddhist sites from the third century AD onward, while narrative sculptures become less frequent.[45] The largest ones might be regarded as very distant ancestors of the colossal Buddha statues constructed in other parts of Asia, such as the giant grotto sculptures of fifth- and eighth-century China (e.g. Yungang and Longmen Grottoes) or the late sixth- to seventh-century Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan (Figs. 16 and 17).[46]

By that period it is misleading to refer to such images as '*the* Buddha', for Buddhism had come to embrace many Buddhas of different epochs, past and



Figure 15. Small (17 cm high) Gandharan schist head of the Buddha, second to third century AD. Note the comparisons with Fig. 14 in sharply defined eyebrows, mouth, youthful skin, and wavy strands of hair.

[43] On the relationship with Apollo see among others Foucher (1913); Spagnoli (1995). Current collaborative research involving the author has identified a Gandharan Buddha head which appears to replicate a Roman sculptural type of Artemis/Diana in some detail, but such specific copying was exceptional.

[44] For the development of the main types of Buddha imagery see esp. Rhi (2008a); Rhi (2021).

[45] Behrendt (2004), esp. 268-9.

[46] See Yi (2018) for Yungang, including Gandharan and classical influences. On Bamiyan: Morgan (2012).



Figure 16. The colossal Buddha sculptures of Cave 20 at Yungang, Shanxi Province, China, c. AD 460 (main Buddha figure 13.7 m high).

future, not only the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. Already in the period of the Gandharan sculptures a variety of Buddhas were recognized and at least some were explicitly represented: the seven Buddhas of the past, Dipankara, and the future Buddha Maitreya. With the exception of Maitreya, who is shown with the iconography of a bodhisattva (Fig. 18), similar imagery is used for different Buddhas and their identification is sometimes debatable if there are no clues from the context. The refined distinction between the Buddhas may have had limited practical relevance for the daily lives of adherents.[47]

Supporting Characters

Bodhisattvas are second only to the Buddha in the prominence given to them on Gandharan monuments.[48] They are usually portrayed with a quite different iconography from the Buddha's. These are princely figures who stand or sit in elaborately draped robes, wearing rich

[47] Rhi (2023).

[48] For all the lesser figures of Gandharan art see Foucher (1905-1951), vol. 2, 1-278.

bracelets and necklaces. They sport luxuriant moustaches and elaborate hair or headdresses. They might appear to evoke the worldly luxury that the Buddha himself had renounced, but for their austere, passionless features and the nimbuses that back their heads.[49] This is appropriately paradoxical imagery for almost divine figures, who stand as intermediaries between the mortal world and full enlightenment. Their representations are varied, but include the same recurring attributes. The famously enigmatic Mohammed Nari relief (Fig. 19) contains a veritable gallery of bodhisattvas in different poses, interspersed with meditating and preaching Buddhas.[50]

An exception to this iconography is Vajrapani ('the holder of the *vajra*'), who is a frequent companion to the Buddha in narrative scenes, a sort of body-guard who came to be regarded as a bodhisattva. Some of Vajrapani's representations are so strongly reminiscent of the muscular, usually bearded, club-carrying,



Figure 17. The smaller Buddha at Bamiyan, Afghanistan (photographed in 1977), c. late sixth century AD (38 m high).



Figure 18. Schist standing figure of the bodhisattva Maitreya, c. third century AD. The left hand originally held a water-flask; this and the hairstyle distinguish the figure from other bodhisattvas.

[49] For Gandharan bodhisattva iconography in general see Rhi (2006); Tissot (2002), 198-201, pls. 24-5 for examples of the iconography.

[50] Rhi (2011). For differing approaches to the interpretation, with references to previous scholarship, see Rhi (2023) and Vendova (2023).



Figure 19. The Mohammed Nari stela, carved in schist, third century AD (height 119 cm). A buddha is shown sitting on a lotus, surrounded by other Buddhas and many bodhisattvas. The relief was probably made for use in a shrine.

lionskin-wearing, Graeco-Roman hero-god Herakles/Hercules, that scholars today sometimes call him 'Herakles-Vajrapani' (Figs. 20, 21; cf. 36).[51] Whether directly or indirectly some of the artists of the Greater Gandhara region were apparently very familiar with the imagery of Herakles and considered it appropriate for this powerful, semi-divine character, though contrasting types of representation were also used.

[51] Flood (1989); Santoro (1991); Boardman (1994), 75-153 *passim*; Stančo (2013), 137-57; Homrighausen (2015); Galinsky (2020).





◄ *Figure 20. Gandharan schist relief fragment including Vajrapani among followers of the Buddha, c. second to third century AD. Note his lionskin, sword and mace-like* vajra.

Figure 21. Clay sculpture of Herakles-Vajrapani attending the Buddha's first sermon. From Niche V2, Tapa-e Shotor monastery, Hadda, Afghanistan, c. second half of second century AD?

Around and between the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Gandharan stupas were hundreds of supporting characters. Devotees are numerous: shaven-headed monks and affluent donors venerating the Buddha himself or objects associated with him, such as his revered begging bowl. In individual reliefs there are groups of sometimes enigmatic figures. Some are shown in contemporary, Iranian-style tunics characteristic of the Kushans, while other men and women wear tunics and mantles more reminiscent of the Mediterranean (compare Fig. 8). We also have divine or semi-divine characters such as water deities and monsters. Scenes of music, dancing, and drinking are well attested, and there has been



Figure 22. Gandharan schist relief showing dancing and music-making. The Buddhist significance of such imagery is debated.

a tendency to associate some of these with the imagery of the Graeco-Roman wine god Dionysos (Figs. 8 and 22).[52]

A very common element in the decoration of stupas was the frieze of so-called *putti* (Fig. 23; compare Fig. 24), little boys holding up festal garlands which are clearly derived from the erotes/cupids of the classical world (the loose term *putti* is borrowed from the art of the European Renaissance).[53] Another recurrent character is the winged 'Atlas' (Fig. 25). That modern name is derived from a resemblance to the giant Atlas of classical art (though in Greek mythology he lacked wings).[54] Apparently common also, either within stupa decoration or in individual sculptural 'icons', was the goddess Hariti, sometimes accompanied by her consort Panchika. Her images sometimes resemble seated Graeco-Roman goddesses in pose or attributes or style; she could even be represented holding the classical cornucopia (horn of plenty) (Figs. 26 and 47).[55] Hariti had been an infant-eating demon before she was converted by the Buddha and became the divine protectress of children. The Buddha's other demonic opponents are often represented in scenes of his life as well (Fig. 35). At the other end of the spectrum, the Hindu deities Brahma and Indra appear as divine devotees of the Buddha. They are shown on the Bimaran Casket and feature in a variety of sculptural narratives (Figs. 12, 29, 39).

Thus we have a huge array of participants from different plains of existence, from humans, to demi-gods like *yakshis*, to the highest deities, altogether constituting an expansive and inclusive Buddhist cosmos at the centre of which was the Buddha himself. The arrangement of these subjects on the stupa was somewhat hierarchical, though not enough information survives about the original settings of the sculptures to understand the decisions in detail. It seems that the more 'secular' subjects, including the scenes of drinking and celebration, were typically on the risers of the stairs that climbed the stupa base.[56] The *putti* and

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52 The 'Dionysiac' theme in Gandharan art is intriguing and some figures in published reliefs quite specifically resemble Dionysos's followers like the bestial satyrs and female maenads (see Tanabe [2003], with earlier references; Stančo [2013], 84-109; Vasunia [2022], esp. 82-5). However, its importance should not be exaggerated, not least because it may be a popular subject for forgers. The term 'Dionysiac' tends to be used very inclusively and is attached e.g. to scenes of wine consumption that have no specific link to Dionysos or Graeco-Roman culture.

53 Soper (1951), 306, 317 notes 39 and 41; Ingholt (1957), 152-4, nos. 374-80; Boardman (1994), 130-1; Stančo (2013), 116-7, 124-33; Stewart (2020), 55-6.

54 Stančo (2013), 62-81; Stewart (2020), 56-9.

55 Foucher (1917), 139-46, 271-91; Foucher (1905-1951), vol. 2, 142-55; Ahuja (2006); Stančo (2013), 227-31.

56 Zwalf (1996), 31-2.





Atlas figures seem to have occupied the lower levels of the stupa – the Atlantes are sometimes literally presented as supporting figures in the architecture – while images of the Buddha and stories of his life would have had prominent positions around the base and dome.

▲*Figure 23. Gandharan schist relief from a small stupa (its shape follows the curvature of the stupa drum). Frieze of 'putti' supporting a garland, c. second to third century AD.*

Figure 24. Roman marble sarcophagus with erotes (cupids) holding garlands. Found at Tarsus, Cilicia, early third century AD.

Figure 25. Gandharan schist winged 'Atlas' figure from Jamalgarhi, c. second to third century AD.





Figure 26. Gandharan schist relief of Hariti and Panchika from Takht-i-Bahi, c. second to third century AD. Hariti's posture, the fruit-laden cornucopia, and the figure-hugging tunic falling from her right shoulder are all features of Graeco-Roman goddesses such as Tyche/Fortuna.

Narratives

Among the many stories told through Gandharan works of art, the cycle of tales from the life of the historical Buddha seems, unsurprisingly, to be predominant. The life-story of the Buddha had begun as a collection of oral histories, which had already been written down by the time the Gandharan reliefs were being carved. Both Buddhist narrative texts and enduring oral traditions may have informed their content, but it is not wholly clear which versions of the stories were available to the ancient artists.[57]

The most common scenes were those that marked pivotal moments in the Buddha's life.[58] Their designs and specific motifs were highly repetitive. Like contemporary Roman sculptors, whose practices may have influenced them, the Gandharan artists tended to reproduce popular scenes in a very consistent way, repeating established compositions and including regular characters and details. This may have made the stories more recognizable. However, the less common scenes are sometimes baffling to modern scholars and they may not have been readily comprehensible for ancient viewers either. The subjects of many surviving narrative reliefs have still not been confidently identified. Let us look at a few examples from the repertoire of biographical scenes, while remembering that individual monuments used them selectively.

The Buddha's life-story begins before his birth, with the dream of his mother, Maya (Fig. 27). Here the vision of a heavenly elephant entering her side signals the conception of her son. In the scene of the Buddha's birth (Figure 28), we see gods acting like servants to assist in the haloed baby's miraculous delivery from Maya's side (it is none other than Indra who receives him in a cloth), while she stands clutching a branch of a tree (traditionally regarded as a sala tree) above her head.[59] In many representations of this scene she is shown in the sinuous pose of an Indian *yakshi* or nymph. This rather crudely carved specimen and its counterpart in Figure 36 give an impression of the range of styles and skill levels in Gandharan sculpture, but the iconography itself – the content of the scene – is quite consistent. Another popular subject from Siddhartha's early life is his highly symbolic first bath, facilitated once

[57] See note 32 above.

[58] For the iconography of the Buddha's life in general see Foucher (1905-1951), vol. 1, 264-601; Ali and Qazi (2008); Kurita (2003) which, however, includes unprovenanced objects in private hands.

[59] Bautze-Picron (2010), specifically 209-12. Stoye (2008) has argued for Graeco-Roman precedents for the imagery, though the best comparisons are problematically late.



Figure 27. Gandharan schist relief showing Maya's dream, c. second century AD. She sleeps on a luxurious couch, accompanied by servants and guards. The elephant representing the future Buddha was carved on the now damaged nimbus (halo) above the queen.



Figure 28. Gandharan schist relief showing the birth of the Buddha, c. second to third century AD. Found in the Gandhara region c. late nineteenth century. It appears to have belonged to the same stupa as Figure 36 judging from the stylistic and technical similarity.

again by gods, Indra and Brahma (Fig. 29). The subject is particularly interesting in the context of this book, for it exhibits marked similarities with Graeco-Roman imagery. The infant Buddha, standing like a



Figure 29. Gandharan schist relief showing the Buddha's first bath.

▼Figure 30. Fragment of a Roman sarcophagus relief, c. late second century AD.





Figure 31. Gandharan schist relief showing the young Siddhartha, the future Buddha, in an archery contest, assisted by a monkey, from Takht-i-Bahi, c. second to third century AD.

miniaturized adult on a tripod table, recalls Roman sculptures showing the creation of the first man by the god Prometheus (Fig. 30).[60]

A series of common scenes deals with the early years of Siddhartha and his development as a prince (Fig. 31). The story culminates in his discovery of the hardships of the outside world and his renunciation of his comfortable life. In representations of the 'Great Departure' (Fig. 32), he leaves his wife and family and sneaks out of the palace, still wearing aristocratic garb, while *yakshas* muffle the horse's hooves to aid his discreet exit. There is a notable similarity between this imagery and Roman scenes of gentlemen on horseback, out of which the Christian image of Christ's entry into Jerusalem later evolved (Fig. 33). The extraordinary visual rhyming of these very different religious scenes has long been noted, but the connection is evidently very indirect and hard to explain.[61]

The Buddha's enlightenment (Fig. 34) is followed by his successful efforts to teach the *dharma* and convert even the most unpromising subjects, including demons and monsters. Occasionally represented also is the grotesque demon army of the Buddha's adversary Mara (Fig. 35).[62]

[60] Stoye (2004) and Stewart (2020), 64-6, pointing to different Roman parallels.
[61] See Buchthal (1945), 12-3; Stewart (2020), 62-4.
[62] Malandra (1981).



Figure 32. Gandharan relief showing the Great Departure of Siddhartha. From Loriyan Tangai, c. second to third century AD.

▼ *Figure 33. Detail of Roman sarcophagus relief showing Jesus Christ's entry into Jerusalem. From the Vatican area of Rome, fourth century AD.*



Figure 34. Gandharan schist relief showing the Buddha's enlightenment beneath a pipal tree, c. second to third century AD.



▼ Figure 35. Gandharan schist relief showing Mara's demon army, c. second to third century AD.



Finally, he succumbs to food-poisoning in old age, and in perhaps the most numerous surviving scene, we see his disciples and other followers in various states of grief around the Buddha's death-bed (Fig. 36 and 44). This was the *Mahaparinirvana* – his final release – a scene which is both close to the details of literary accounts and visually reminiscent of Roman funerary scenes (Fig. 37; cf. Fig. 56).[63] The aftermath of this pivotal event is also shown in reliefs: the Buddha's funeral and the burial of his relics: a subject of the most immediate relevance for stupa art.

Narrative scenes were not limited to the Buddha's final existence in the world. They include some of the *jatakas* – stories of the Buddha's past lives in previous incarnations, during which he is regarded as a bodhisattva. Hundreds of *jataka* stories are known from literature and from later Buddhist art in

[63] Stewart (2020), 72-4.



Figure 36. Gandharan schist relief showing the death (the Mahaparinirvana*) of the Buddha, c. second to third century AD. Found in the Gandhara region c. late nineteenth century. It appears to have belonged to the same stupa as Figure 28. Note Vajrapani at the left of the scene.*

▼ *Figure 37. Roman marble sarcophagus with representation of a young girl's death-bed and mourners. Later second century AD.*



other regions, but only around fifteen have so far been securely identified in Gandharan art.[64] Among these are the very popular *Dipankara-jataka*, in which the bodhisattva, the future Buddha Shakyamuni, prostrates himself and places his hair beneath the feet of the Buddha Dipankara, prompting a prophesy of his own eventual buddhahood (Fig. 38);[65] the *Syama-jataka*, in which the bodhisattva is the pious son of two blind ascetics, is shot by a king out hunting deer, and is then restored to life by divine intervention; the *Vishvantara-jataka*, recounting the extreme selflessness of a devout prince who gives away his kingdom's propitious white elephant, his own possessions, and ultimately even his children; and the rarer *Shibi-jataka*, in which the bodhisattva tries to ransom the life of a dove from a hawk by giving his own flesh (fortunately the animals turn out to be the gods in disguise; Fig. 39). An interesting aspect of the last example is its similarity to gruesome Roman scenes of the flaying of Marsyas – a satyr who disastrously challenged the god Apollo to a music context (Fig. 40).[66]

Sometimes Gandharan visual narratives attempt to tell complex stories through series of scenes that recount successive incidents involving the protagonists. Often, however, a single image is expected to encapsulate the whole story or a large element of it.[67] They present the Buddha and

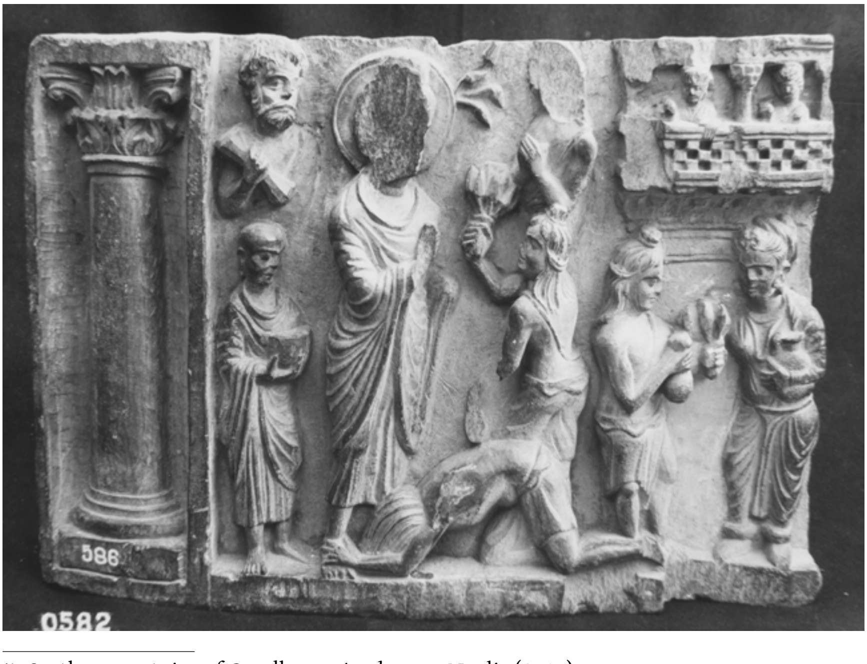


Figure 38. Gandharan schist relief showing the Dipankara-jataka, *c. second to third century AD.*

[64] On the repertoire of Gandharan *jatakas* see Neelis (2019).
[65] Das (2004).
[66] Stewart (2020), 66-7.
[67] On Gandharan narrative technique see e.g. Nehru (1989); Taddei (2015). On artistic



Figure 39. Gandharan relief of the Shibi-jataka, c. second century AD.

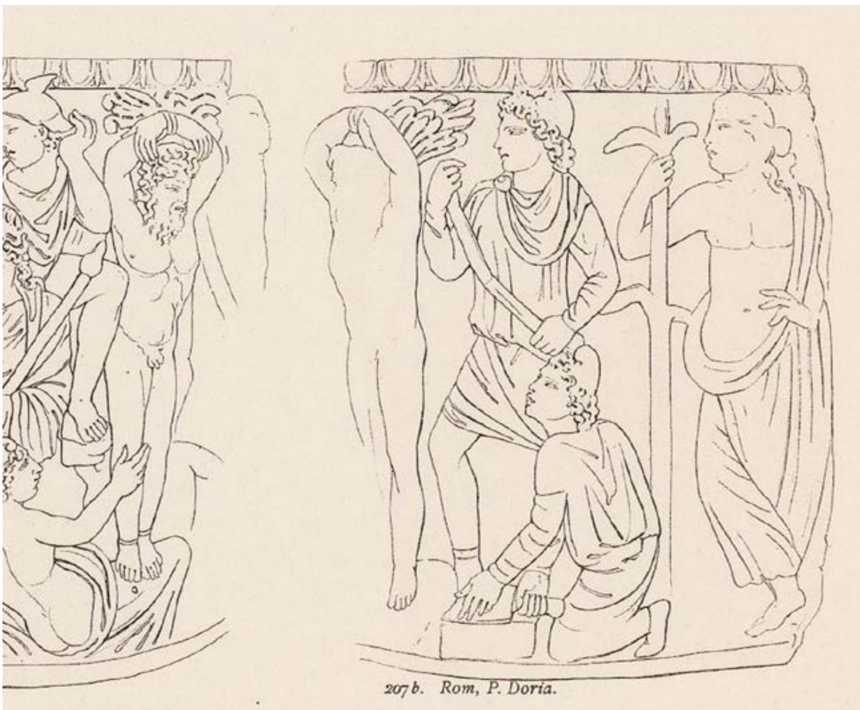


Figure 40. Drawing of the punishment of Marsyas scene on the side of a Roman sarcophagus in the Palazzo Doria Pamphilij, Rome. From the Via Aurelia at Rome, c. AD 230.

other characters as paradigms for righteous behaviour in accordance with *dharma*, sometimes in an extreme form, or as cautionary illustrations of bad behaviour. Some of the sculptures may appear simple and repetitive, in keeping with their purpose of communicating fundamental messages. Yet despite this highly symbolic and exemplary quality, the reliefs are also frequently vivid, expressive, and lifelike, the better to appeal to the intent imaginations of worshippers viewing the stupas and shrines. It was perhaps partly because of that wish for visual immediacy that the Gandharan artists drew upon the techniques of Graeco-Roman art. And so, having introduced the context of Gandharan art, we must now focus on that surprising relationship between east and west. Understanding this cross-cultural association is not simply a matter of archaeological fact. The evidence and our interpretation of it have been profoundly shaped by past attitudes and approaches. Consequently, the next chapter must begin in the nineteenth century, when the early researchers of Gandharan art began to connect it with the culture of ancient Greece.

narrative throughout early Buddhist art in India see Dehejia (1990); Dehejia (1997).

Chapter 2

Greece, Rome and Gandhara

The Nineteenth-Century Rediscovery of Gandhara

By the eighth century, after several turbulent centuries of rule by successive foreign regimes, the patronage of monumental monasteries and shrines in Gandhara had declined; the sites and their sculptures fell into disuse.[1] Already in AD 632 when the Chinese pilgrim Xuangzang visited the region he records the desertion and destruction of monasteries, though he also found flourishing pockets of Buddhist devotion.[2]

Some of the ancient remains were still a visible part of the landscape in the centuries that followed and right up to the early nineteenth century.[3] Familiarity with them is reflected in some topographical names such as Gumbat ('the dome' in Pashto). Presumably sculptural fragments were periodically discovered throughout the centuries. However, the first consistent curiosity about Gandharan archaeology seems to have emerged around the 1830s on the part of French officers serving the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the remarkable, enigmatic British deserter and adventurer Charles Masson (real name James Lewis).[4] Between 1833 and 1838 Masson travelled in eastern Afghanistan purchasing and excavating artefacts of the Gandharan era, particularly relic deposits from stupas which included the Bimaran Casket (Fig. 12). Despite his lack of training or official role, his documentation of the sites and finds was ahead of its time.[5]

Various broadly 'archaeological' activity was occurring in that decade, but the door was opened to more extensive campaigns under the auspices of the British military (initially the army of the East India Company) after the conclusion of the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1846, when the Punjab and North-West Frontier became effectively a client state or buffer zone for the British. Perhaps the most significant site of this period was the

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[1] For overview see Litvinsky (1996), 107-87; Zwalf (1996), 16-7.
[2] Zwalf (1996), 30.
[3] See Errington (1987), 9-28 on the loss and rediscovery of the Buddhist sites.
[4] On the first European study see Errington (1987), 29-63. For the modern rediscovery of Gandhara in general: Rienjang and Stewart (2022).
[5] On Masson and his collections see the trilogy Errington (2017a), Errington (2017b) and Errington (2021).

Buddhist monastery at Jamalgarhi, which was discovered in 1848 and excavated in 1852 and 1873 – 'excavation' here essentially meaning a systematic hunt for sculptural remains.[6] Numerous campaigns followed in the remainder of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, alongside much more haphazard souvenir-hunting, which the British authorities eventually tried to curb, with limited success.[7] A leading figure in the 'official' efforts to explore and document Gandharan archaeology was the antiquary, engineer and soldier Sir Alexander Cunningham (Fig. 41), who in 1861 was made the first Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India. A wealth of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century photographs documents the quantity of the sculptural finds from important sites such as Loriyan Tangai (Fig. 42), many of them made for the Archaeological Survey of India, and to some extent they show sincere efforts to record the archaeology scientifically, even if the information preserved is desperately limited by modern standards. Most of the more spectacular finds ended up eventually in museum collections in British India or London. As a result, today the Peshawar Museum and Lahore Museum, the Indian Museum in Kolkata and the post-partition Government Museum and Art Gallery in Chandigarh hold the largest Gandharan collections alongside that of the British Museum in London. The popular interest in Gandharan sculpture outside India was not just fuelled by military activity. Scholarship on Gandharan culture became international, and in Europe the remarkable Hungarian linguist and educationalist G.W. Leitner had a significant role in promoting Gandharan art to the public (see inset box).[8]

Figure 41. Major-General Sir Alexander Cunningham (c. 1885) seated with sculptures from Jamalgarhi.



[6] On Jamalgarhi see Errington (1987) and Errington (2022); she undertook the detective work required to piece together surviving documentary and archaeological evidence.
[7] See e.g. Z. Khan (2022). An 'Ancient Monuments Preservation Act' was instituted in India in 1904. For further discussions of colonial archaeology on the North-West Frontier see e.g. Errington (1987); R. Khan (2020); Olivieri (2015); Brancaccio (2017); Morgan and Olivieri (2022); R. Khan (2023).
[8] Errington (1997); Roberts and Dovoli (n.d.). Both studies have informed the inset box presented here.



Figure 42. Alexander Caddy's photography of 1896, documenting recently discovered sculptures at Loriyan Tangai.

The Budapest-born Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1840-1899) had an extraordinarily varied life as a linguist, professor, barrister, administrator, and proponent of Islamic and Asian culture in the early decades of the British Raj. After serving in his early 20s as Professor of Arabic in London, he was appointed as Principal of the new Lahore Government College and was involved in other notable educational ventures. Leitner retired under a cloud in 1886 and on returning to England he founded an Oriental University Institute at Woking (about 30 kilometres from London) which existed till his death, as well as the country's first mosque, which still operates.

Leitner arranged excavations in north-west India during the 1870s, building up a large collection of Gandharan sculptures from Takht-i-Bahi and elsewhere. He exhibited 184 sculptures among many other specimens at the Vienna International Exhibition in 1873, largely passing the venture off as his own though officially he was representing the Punjab Government. These artefacts were then sent to London and loaned in due course to the Indian Museum. A separate exhibition in Florence followed in 1878 with around 115 Gandharan pieces. Despite Leitner's efforts, these collections never found a permanent home in his lifetime. Nevertheless, they had an impact as the first large-scale Gandharan collections to be exposed to the European public. The bulk of Leitner's sculptures (including the relief in Fig. 23) were purchased after his death by the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin.

For the European soldiers and officials who explored Gandharan art in the latter half of the nineteenth century, many of whom were educated in ancient Greek and Roman history and literature, the most remarkable characteristic of the sculptures was their uncanny resemblance to 'western' art. The figures and decorative motifs in the Gandharan reliefs echoed, time and again, the conventions of classical art, which had so thoroughly shaped modern European culture. This apparent affinity to the authoritative and respected heritage of Graeco-Roman antiquity obviously appealed to the world-view of colonialists at time when Gandhara was a frontier of the British Empire.[9] Yet the fascination with the classical appearance of Gandharan sculpture went deeper and wider than that.

'Graeco-Buddhist Art' and the Hellenistic Tradition

The term 'Gandhara(n) art' was not used until the early 1900s. Before then it was customarily called 'Graeco-Buddhist' art.[10] That phrase retains a popular currency today, but it is deeply deceptive in several ways and should be avoided.[11] It reflects a belief that western affinities were an essential, defining feature of Gandharan art: as the great French Indologist Alfred Foucher put it, 'the Indian material was poured into a western mould'.[12] This attitude is famously expressed in the opening pages of Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel *Kim*, inspired by the Gandharan collections of Lahore Museum, which Kipling's father curated: 'In the entrance-hall stood the larger figures of the Greco-Buddhist sculptures done, savants know how long since, by forgotten workmen whose hands were feeling, and not unskilfully, for the mysteriously transmitted Grecian touch.'[13] In contrast to this notion of cultural dependency, most scholarship today regards Gandharan art on its own terms: as wholly Gandharan and Buddhist in its origins and functions, albeit sometimes heavily *influenced* by external traditions. Gandharan art reflects global artistic connections in a remarkable way, but that should not require us to see it as a 'hybrid' mix of different cultures. Similarly problematic is the assumption, in the phrase 'Graeco-Buddhist', that the foreign influence on Gandharan art was specifically Greek and that its development was

[9] Ball (2020), 1-5. For a seminal study of the colonial context of the reception of Gandharan art see Abe (1995).
[10] On 'Gandhara' see Wang (2022). 'Gr(a)eco-Buddhist' was in use by the 1860s and possibly popularized by G.W. Leitner: Errington (1997), 141; Roberts and Dovoli (n.d.).
[11] See further critique by Olivieri (2022), 53-4 ('but the label re-mains stubbornly stuck on the bottle').
[12] Foucher (1917), 130.
[13] Kipling (1901).

rooted in the Hellenistic world. This compelling view is still widely held today and deserves to be analysed in more detail.

To be clear: there is no doubt that Gandharan art reveals a strong visual affinity to the classical art of the Graeco-Roman world, which was centred on the Mediterranean, thousands of kilometres to the west. Some would argue that the classical impact on Gandharan art has been exaggerated because modern observers (and not just in Europe and America but also in Asia) are fascinated by the connection and tend to give greater attention and prominence to works of art which illustrate such influence. There is some justification for the criticism, yet however one looks at it, the classical aspect of Gandharan art is inescapable.[14]

The resemblance takes various forms. We have encountered some examples already: the Apolline appearance of the Buddha (Figs. 14 and 15); Corinthian columns and foreign costumes (Fig. 8); the ubiquitous cupid-like garland-bearers (Figs. 23 and 24); the 'Atlantes' and images of Hariti, which echo the conventions used for classical goddesses and heroes (Figs. 25, 26, 47); the classical configurations of Buddhist visual stories (Figs. 29-40). In fact most of the works already illustrated above resemble Graeco-Roman sculpture in one way or another. We are dealing here with several different kinds of resemblance between Gandharan and classical art. Sometimes it is a matter of style, by which I mean here not the individual traits of particular artists, but a more general manner of representing subjects which is typical of Greek art: the recurring tendencies of an artistic tradition which preferred plausible, 'naturalistic' renderings of bodies, movement, space and interaction of figures. This might be manifested in very realistic or exaggeratedly expressive facial features (Figs. 43

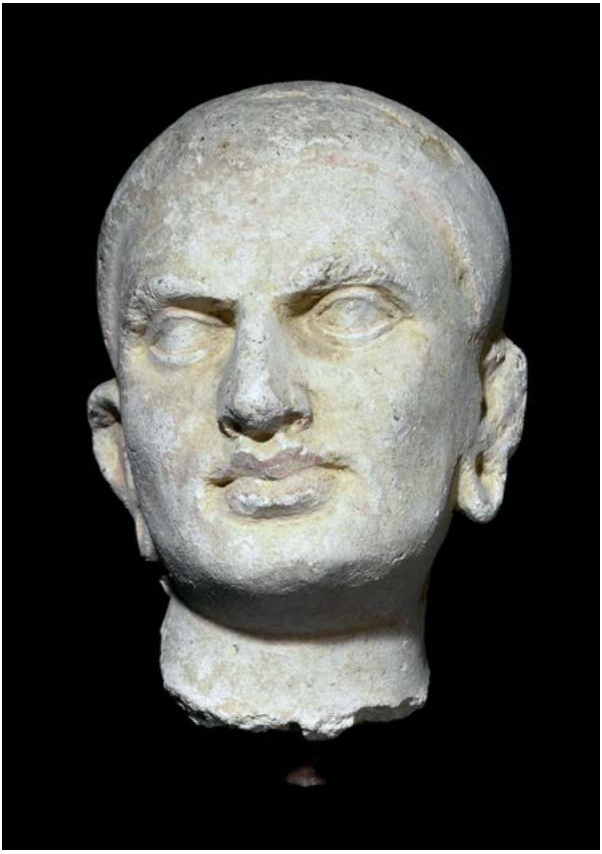


Figure 43. Painted stucco head of a monk, probably from Hadda in Afghanistan, c. fourth to fifth century AD. It would have been part of a larger Buddhist narrative scene. The realism of the facial features is close to Hellenistic Greek and Roman portraiture.

[14] For critical assessments see Filigenzi (2012); Falser (2015). For a critical assessment of approaches to Gandharan art see also Bracey (2020).

Figure 44. Detail of a grieving follower of the Buddha from a Gandharan schist relief showing part of the Mahaparinirvana, c. second- to third-century AD.



and 44), but more often it involves the combination of approximately lifelike, dynamic bodies with highly conventional, emotionless and idealized faces: a balancing of the real and the ideal which had found favour in fifth-century BC Greece and endured throughout the classical tradition. This is what we have seen above in images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. Another aspect which could be put more loosely under the heading of 'stylistic' borrowing is the conventional Graeco-Roman repertoire of gestures and poses which the figures in Gandharan reliefs adopt time and time again. This is strikingly illustrated by the elongated oblong reliefs that were probably stair-risers on stupas (Figs. 8 and 46).[15] The rather puzzling men and women on these sculptures seem to slip naturally into postures which were originally invented by Greek artists, notably the enlivening device of contrapposto, which introduces movement into figures by distributing the body's weight unevenly on the legs. Sometimes the similarity in stance and gesture between the classical and Gandharan figures is almost uncanny (Figs. 45 and 46). It is as if they share the same DNA, the family resemblance betrayed not only by physical appearance but also by the signature traits of their behaviour.

Figure 45. Roman child's sarcophagus with a relief of Muses, from the Isola Sacra necropolis, Ostia, c. late second century AD.



[15] These are sometimes referred to collectively as Buner reliefs, though not all are from the Buner area.



▲Figure 46. Gandharan stair-riser relief of standing figures, from Takht-i-Bahi, c. second to third century AD.



Figure 47. Small (18 cm high) Gandharan schist relief of Hariti and Panchika, c. second to third century AD.

Examples of this kind also illustrate a surprising similarity in the figures' costume, for very often Gandharan reliefs dress their characters in clothes which would not be at all out of place in ancient Greece or the Roman Empire. We often see sleeved tunics and cloaks, or the off-the-

shoulder worker's tunic called an *exomis* in the Greek world. But these are fairly practical garments and it is not surprising to come across them in disparate culture settings. What is unmistakable is the Greek-style *himation* (mantle), a rectangle of cloth draped around the body, usually over a tunic, by both men and women. This is what we see, for example, on four individuals in Figure 46 (the second, then fourth, fifth and sixth from the left). It also appears to be the inspiration for the form of the Buddha's own monastic robe. The *himation* had a very long life in the Greek world. It was the smart dress of men and women for centuries and continued to be used in the eastern, Greek-speaking regions of the Roman Empire (it should not be confused with the similar but more voluminous Roman toga, which was used by men in the western Empire).[16] It was a difficult garment, worn with poise in such a way as to imply social status and modesty. It was often wrapped around the elbow (the 'arm-in-sling' pose) or clutched with the hand. This is what we see in Figure 46, where we can also spot another widespread gesture of modesty from Graeco-Roman art: the central female's right hand held up to her face. It is impossible to tell how far the borrowing of Graeco-Roman dress is a purely artistic fiction, or whether it might have reflected cultural influence in the real world. Would Gandharan *himatia* have looked foreign or fantastical to ancient viewers or were they a facet of everyday life?

The Gandharan repertoire of imported Graeco-Roman features was extensive and flexible. Classical style, figure-types, and iconographical elements like dress did not always go together. Compare, for instance, the two radically different approaches to representing Hariti and Panchika in Figures 26 and 47; both of them are derived in different ways from classical imagery, but the latter exhibits its artist's preference for stylized, elastic-looking drapery folds, rubbery anatomy, and a form of Iranian tunic for the male god.

Figure 48 exemplifies the opposite extreme: not a creative combination of influences but an extraordinarily systematic adoption of classical models. It is an exceptional piece in every way and one could argue that it is therefore a poor exemplar of Gandharan sculpture in general; at the same time, however, it is emblematic of the mixed cultural heritage of Gandhara. On this small relief, apparently found near Hund on the River Indus and probably made to decorate a stair on a miniature stupa, we see a visual story that is still instantly recognizable to anyone familiar

[16] On the *himation* and its associations in the Greek tradition see Smith (1998), esp. 65-6; Smith (2006), 35-8. For reflections on the *himation* in Gandhara see Rowland (1945). The dress of Gandharan figures has often, wrongly, been compared with Roman togas.

with Greek mythology: the legend of the Wooden Horse.[17] The animal on wheels is the hollow horse which the Greeks used to smuggle warriors into the city of Troy, enabling them to sack it after a ten-year siege (artistic licence has been employed with the scale in order to make the horse a manageable size!). We see the Trojan Horse at the moment it is about to be conveyed through the gates of the doomed city. The man spearing it is Laocoon, the priest who suspected danger and tried to foil the ruse. The half-naked female in the gateway is Cassandra, the prophetic priestess whose warnings were also ignored by the ill-fated Trojans. This, at least, is how a Greek or Roman observer would have read the scene. It is not impossible that some Gandharan viewers knew the Greek myth in these terms. But given the presumed Buddhist context, it is more likely that the classical story had been conflated with a Buddhist narrative unknown to us today, the characters reinvented for a moral tale of the Buddha's past life, perhaps.[18] It is particularly remarkable that the Gandharan artist has chosen not only to reproduce a story with Greek origins but to do so with imagery derived from the classical world. The lifelike figures have poses and gestures familiar in Graeco-Roman art, and most of them have classical-looking clothes – only 'Cassandra' with the necklace hanging between her breasts is more reminiscent of ancient Indian art. In fact, the whole scene is extremely close to western images made around the first and second centuries AD (Fig. 49).

These few examples are representative of a pervasive Gandharan interest in classical conventions. To be sure, there is much stylistic variety through the centuries: different artists, workshops, and production areas had their own preferences. Some sculptures draw very selectively on classical precedents; many others only faintly or not at all. Some works are strikingly innovative and original, even while they appear quite subtly to echo the kind of relief sculpture carved in marble in the Mediterranean. The process of imitation is never slavish, and there are rarely, if ever, 'mistakes' or 'misunderstandings' of directly copied models. It is as if those Gandharan artists interested in Graeco-Roman conventions had a comprehensive understanding of them deeply rooted in their training as craftsmen. They seem to have known the classical compositions and artistic motifs intimately and intuitively adapted them to their own purposes. This implies that the influence was already ingrained in Gandhara by the time most of the surviving sculptures were made. It is not the product of a momentary cultural contact, nor can it be

► Figure 49. Detail of a Roman marble sarcophagus lid with scenes from the Trojan War, c. late second century AD.

[17] London, British Museum, inv. OA 1990.10-13.1. Zwalf (1996), vol. 1, 233-4, no. 300; Stewart (2016), with full bibliography at 6, n. 16.

[18] Foucher (1950). Rather similar myths existed in India, but are quite different in their specific content.

explained merely by familiarity with imported images from the west. It is hard to imagine that the mere copying of Greek or Roman objects could result in such a seamless assimilation of an alien artistic tradition, unless there was a pre-existing familiarity with it and a profound inclination to use it. For all these reasons, the word 'influence', while convenient for describing the relationship between Gandhara and the classical world, seems hardly appropriate. It implies that Gandharan art was *passively* affected by exposure to external models. It was not.

So how are we to explain these remarkable echoes of a distant artistic tradition which originated some 4,000 kilometres to the west? An immediate solution seems to be offered by Alexander the Great, the Macedonian Greek king who so captured the imagination of nineteenth-

Figure 48. Gandharan schist relief with scene of the 'Wooden Horse', from Hund, c. second century AD.





century colonial archaeologists.[19] Between his accession in 336 BC and his death at Babylon in 323 BC, Alexander expanded the conquests of his father, Philip of Macedonia, to encompass the entire territory of the Achaemenid Persian Empire. In 326 BC he conquered Gandhara and took his army across the River Indus. Alexander's empire barely outlived him; it was fragmented into successor states. But its legacy was the diffusion of Greek culture from the Mediterranean to Central Asia. The former lands of the Persian Empire were now ruled by monarchs of Macedonian ancestry. Greek language, customs, and political practices were perpetuated in numerous colonies perhaps dominated by populations that defined themselves as Greek, while aspects of Greek culture were also adopted and adapted by many of non-Greek family heritage.[20] For most of the third and second centuries BC, Bactria (centred on northern Afghanistan) was controlled by the break-away kingdom of 'Graeco-Bactrian' rulers such as Diodotos I (*c.* 250-235 BC), Euthydemos I (*c.* 225-200 BC) and Eukratides I (*c.* 170-145 BC). In the early second century BC, expansionist campaigns resulted in the annexation of Gandhara. Gandhara and neighbouring regions came under the control of 'Indo-Greek' monarchs, who had been ousted from the original Bactrian seat of power (Bactria itself collapsed before the end of the century). Historical evidence for these rulers is thin and they are best known through their surviving coin types, which project an elevated idea of their authority.[21]

Indo-Greek coinage bespeaks a cultural blending which may have been both ideological and pragmatic. The coins are bilingual, with similar inscriptions in Greek and Gandhari on the observe and reverse (Fig. 50). They appeal for authority to the conventions of earlier Hellenistic coin-designs, going back to Alexander's early successors. One of the Indo-Greek kings, Menander (*c.* 160-130 BC), later entered Buddhist tradition as the pious convert Milinda – probably little more than a legend, but one that reflects the intertwining of Greek and indigenous cultures in what has been called 'the Hellenistic Far east'.[22]

[19] On the fascination of Alexander the Great see Ball (2020), 1-5; Morgan and Olivieri (2022), esp. 21-4.

[20] For overviews of the Hellenistic world see e.g. Walbank (1981); Pollitt (1986), on art; Erskine (2003); Thonemann (2015); Thonemann (2016).

[21] For recent overviews of the Graeco-Bactrians and Indo-Greeks, with further bibliography, Mairs (2014); Mairs (2021). For a comprehensive overview of archaeological bibliography on the topic see Mairs (2011) with regular updates at <https://hellenisticfareast.wordpress.com> (last consulted 22 August 2023). For the coins: Bopearachchi (1991) and particularly the up-to-date BIGR (Coins of the Bactrian and Indo-Greek Rulers) database: <https://numismatics.org/bigr>. Art: Boardman (1994), 99-124.

[22] The tradition goes back to the Buddhist text *Milindapañha* ('The Questions of Milinda'), which may have been composed in Gandhara: M. Willis 'The Question(s) of Milinda'



Figure 50. Silver coin (tetradrachm) of Menander I.

*The obverse (front) of the coin shows the king's head in profile, wearing a helmet and diadem; the Greek inscription reads 'of the saviour king Menander'. The reverse shows a traditional standing figure of the goddess Athena with the Gandhari inscription (in kharoshthi script) 'of the saviour great king [*maharaja*] Menander'.*

Ever since the classical appearance of Gandharan Buddhist art was recognized, the Hellenistic world has been regarded as the matrix from which it developed. This theory was strengthened by the belief of early commentators such as Alfred Foucher that Gandharan art had somewhat earlier roots than is now thought and that the image of the Buddha had been conceived before the end of the Hellenistic period, in the first century BC. For a long time, the hypothesis of Greek origins was supported by frustratingly little archaeology. The Greek presence in Afghanistan and India/Pakistan seemed to have left scarcely a trace. Yet some scholars remained certain that further evidence would emerge to support the information provided by literary sources and coinage. In 1960, the French archaeologist Daniel Schlumberger presciently suggested that 'some day or other the monuments of the Greek kings from the lands of the Oxus [river] cannot fail to reappear'.[23] Within two years he was proven correct by the discovery of Ai Khanoum in north-eastern Afghanistan. Ai Khanoum (which has subsequently been all but destroyed by looting) was the site of a Hellenistic Greek colony which flourished under King Eukratides, before being abandoned at some time around the 130s BC.[24] From the perspective of Greek archaeology, its

(unpublished presentation 14 June 2016) <10.5281/zenodo.253879>. For a discussion of all the sources (and accepting the theory that there were actually two kings called Menander) see Kubica (2021).

[23] Schlumberger (1960a), 153.

[24] For work on Ai Khanoum see esp. Bernard (1973). A series of publications of different parts of the site has continued under the title *Fouilles d'Aï Khanoum*. Among these, on issues around Greek culture at the site, note especially Veuve (1987) and Rapin (1992).

physical character is unusual. Some of the building methods were local ones (e.g. mudbrick; flat roofs; corridors in place of porticoes), no doubt for practical reasons.[25] Aspects of the architecture, including the main temple (the so-called Temple of the Indented Niches) reflect Achaemenid Persian traditions, and indeed the street-plan probably retains a trace of an earlier, Achaemenid settlement.[26] Nevertheless, Ai Khanoum also provided abundant evidence of Greek culture, including dedications and administrative documents in Greek, and art-works of Greek appearance (Fig. 51).[27] Since the 1960s, further traces of the classical artistic presence have emerged alongside a larger, and growing, body of evidence for other aspects of Graeco-Bactrian or Indo-Greek culture. For instance, an extensive Italian excavation project at Barikot in the Swat Valley of Pakistan (ancient Bazira) has revealed an unbroken urban history extending from the time of the Greek colonists to the fourth or fifth century AD.[28] A handful of Greek inscriptions are part of its complex cultural mix during this period and the site has yielded relatively early evidence of Buddhist practice within this milieu.[29]

Figure 51. Limestone funerary stele (gravestone) with relief of a youth wearing a cloak, from the cemetery of Ai Khanoum, c. third to second century BC.



It must be added that any Hellenistic Greek artistic influence in this region does not need to be attributed only to those who actually thought of themselves as Greeks. During the Hellenistic period, the conventions of Greek art, its religious iconography and techniques of realistic representation, became widespread and are evident in works of art made for non-Greeks. They can be found among peoples of local or nomadic ancestry in Central Asia, as we see from the treasures of Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan or the remarkable, lifelike clay sculptures of Khalchayan in southern Uzbekistan (Figs. 52 and 53).[30] In Hellenistic terms these are late examples – from the first centuries BC and AD – and they could be viewed as a 'post-Hellenistic' legacy – a lingering trace influence of the Greek presence in Bactria and Gandhara. More generally, it has long been

Useful also are Rapin (1990) and Mairs (2014), 57-101.

[25] Martinez-Sève (2014), esp. 278-81; Lecuyot (2020).

[26] Mairs (2013); Martinez-Sève (2014).

[27] Hiebert and Cambon (2011), 81-130; Martinez-Sève (2014).

[28] Olivieri (2021).

[29] Tribulato and Olivieri (2017).

[30] Khalchayan: Pugachenkova (1971). Tillya Tepe: Saranidi (1980); Hiebert and Cambon (2011), 219-93. See also Boardman (1994), 145-6.



Figure 52. Miniature gold figure with turquoise inlay, used to adorn the body of a woman in Tillya Tepe Tomb 6, c. mid first century AD. The winged goddess adapts the classical iconography of Aphrodite.

persuasively argued by scholars such as Daniel Schlumberger, that Hellenistic Greek art persisted for centuries in combination with Iranian and other regional traditions across a vast swathe of territory, from the Levant to India.[31] John Marshall proposed that the Parthians, who manifested the common Hellenized culture of west Asia, had a role to play in transmitting Greek traditions to Gandhara in the period when Buddhist art emerged here and this idea was embraced by later scholars.[32] By 'Parthians' we mean people of Iranian culture who assumed power in parts of the Hellenistic world under the rule of the Arsacid dynasty. Parthian (or 'Indo-Parthian') aristocrats ruled as local potentates in Gandhara in the first century AD, before the ascendancy of the Kushans. We know little about these rulers beyond the evidence of their coins, but Parthian art was enmeshed with Hellenistic Greek traditions.[33] It remains likely that Parthian influence made at least some contribution to the development of Gandharan Buddhist art.

Even from this short summary it may appear obvious that in Gandharan art, we are dealing with some kind of legacy of the Hellenistic Greek world, even if 'Graeco-Buddhist' is not the appropriate description. But let us not jump to conclusions, for the explanation is not so straightforward.

Figure 53. Painted clay sculpture of a warrior, from a battle scene in the palatial hall at Khalchayan, Uzbekistan, first century BC.



The Roman Empire and Gandhara

In the preceding discussion I have often avoided referring specifically to 'Greek' models for Gandharan art, using the vaguer terms 'classical' and 'Graeco-Roman'. This is because the ancient classical tradition

[31] Schlumberger (1960a) and (1960b).

[32] Marshall (1960). Nehru (1989), esp. 65-97, offers a complex re-evaluation of the traditions suggested by the evidence from Taxila and elsewhere.

[33] For a recent overview of the Parthians see Bruno (2021). Indo-Parthians: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (vol. 13, fasc. 1, 100-103) s.v. 'Indo-Parthian Dynasty' (C. Fröhlich) <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/indo-parthian-dynasty-1> (last consulted 21 September 2023).

encompassed not only Hellenistic Greece but also the Roman Empire, and Rome is an important part of this story.

The account above – of how the Greeks and Greek cultural influence in Central Asia may have helped shape Gandharan art – is confronted by some obstacles, the most significant of which is chronology. When scholars first started to study Gandharan art, its dating presented a considerable challenge. Big questions about chronology remain, but decades of excavation and close study of the sculptures, as well as advances in numismatics (coins are crucial for dating) have brought the picture into much sharper focus.[34] The earliest datable Gandharan sculptures used in Buddhist shrines can be placed in the second quarter of the first century AD, in the period of Indo-Parthian control in the region. These sculptures are from the great archaeological sites of the Swat Valley – Saidu Sharif and Butkara I – which were meticulously excavated and studied by Italian archaeologists over many years. Similar works were very possibly made further south in the Peshawar Basin at the same time, though the evidence is very unclear.[35] In any case, Gandharan religious sculpture appears to have been flourishing widely by the end of the century.

By convention, the Hellenistic period is normally reckoned to have ended in 31 BC, when the Roman Emperor Octavian (Augustus) defeated the last, autonomous Hellenistic Greek monarch, Cleopatra VII. So strictly speaking, Gandharan art is a post-Hellenistic phenomenon. However, that is merely a matter of semantics. What is more important is that rule of the region by kings of Greek heritage had ended long before, in the early decades of the first century BC. In other words, there is a gap of around a century between the last Indo-Greeks, about whom we know next to nothing, and the earliest Gandharan sculpture. The gap is even larger between the last substantial evidence of Greek art in Central Asia and the origins of the Gandharan tradition. Consequently, there is no explicit evidence of continuity between the Hellenistic states and the art of Buddhist Gandhara. That does not necessarily mean that there was no cultural continuity, nor does it invalidate the notion of a lingering post-Hellenistic or 'Graeco-Iranian' heritage in the region, which was alluded to above. Archaeology, particularly in this region, wrestles with the loss of evidence. Our understanding could be transformed by future finds,

[34] For an overview and further bibliography see Rienjang and Stewart (2018), including a key synthesis of the coin evidence by Joe Cribb (Cribb [2018]).
[35] On the chronology of the Swat monuments: Faccenna and Taddei (1962-4); Faccenna (2001); Olivieri (2022), esp. 31-42; Olivieri (2023), 61-2. See Naiki (2019) for evidence from the Peshawar Basin.

just as the discovery of Ai Khanoum was transformative in its day. In the words of a famous aphorism: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Nevertheless, the paucity of evidence linking the Hellenistic world to Gandharan art is suggestive. Further reflection is also demanded by the character of the earliest Gandharan sculpture. These very remarkable Swat Valley reliefs appear almost out of nowhere, and there are good reasons to believe that they may have been influenced by Hellenistic Greek or Roman art in certain respects. The extraordinary Buddhist narrative frieze made for the stupa at Saidu Sharif, just after the mid first century AD, has been justifiably compared with the Great Altar at Pergamon two hundred and fifty years earlier. It has been suggested that the early Gandharan master artist was drawing upon a rich heritage of Hellenistic imagery in a brilliantly inventive way.[36] But superficially at least, their style is markedly different – markedly less 'classical' – than that of the later Gandharan sculptures. The figures are less naturalistic, more schematic (Fig. 54). That is to say, conventional motifs are privileged over observations of anatomy and movement. In particular, they are highly linear: the chisel is used to incise parallel lines for hair and clothing. The bold effect of this carving style creates a patterned impression which differs from most Graeco-Roman sculpture, though it has some possible affinities with Parthian sculpture and the art of the Indian subcontinent.[37] The director of the original excavations at Butkara and Saidu Sharif called it the 'drawing style' ('stile disegnativo'). In contrast, it is the Gandharan sculptures made during the Kushan period, in the late first to third centuries AD, which most conspicuously resemble the traditions of the Graeco-Roman west. This fact argues against any straightforward idea of Hellenistic Greek continuity behind the creation of Gandharan art and suggests, at the very least, a more complicated and changing relationship with outside traditions.

There is an alternative way to approach this relationship: as the product of ongoing *contemporary* interaction between Gandhara and the classical west. For the period in which Gandharan sculpture flourished exactly corresponds with the high-point of artistic and monumental production in the Roman Empire, and it is *Roman imperial* works of art that offer the best classical comparisons with Gandharan images.

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[36] For the most recent assessment of the 'Master of Saidu's' interest in Hellenistic models see Olivieri (2022), esp. 165-81.

[37] Filigenzi (2012).



Figure 54. Schist relief in the 'drawing style' from the stupa frieze at Saidu Sharif I, c. 50s-60s AD. Part of scene of the gift of the elephant to Siddhartha.

The relevance of the Roman Empire was recognized by a few of the early scholars of Gandharan art, and research on the evidence for Roman influence intensified in the 1940s and 1950s.[38] There was strong (sometimes ferocious) resistance to the ideas.[39] In this era, Roman art was not generally highly esteemed by most archaeologists and art historians, whereas ancient Greece held an immense cultural authority. Gandharan artists were seen as inheritors of an admirable Hellenic tradition going

[38] Zwalf (1996), 67 on the origins of the idea. For later Rome-centred work see e.g.: Wheeler (1949); Buchthal (1943); Buchthal (1945); Rowland (1936), esp. 392-5; Rowland (1942); Rowland (1956); Rosenfield (1967); Soper (1951).

[39] E.g. Marshall (1945), 117: 'it is a little surprising, therefore, that this discredited theory should again be resuscitated'. (Marshall's savaging of Buchthal's often tenuous arguments in this review is not without some justification.)

back centuries. But to the proponents of Roman influence it seemed obvious to ask whether the artists were, in fact, imitating the art of a wider, contemporary world to which they belonged.

Underlying these contradictory perspectives was the fact that Greek influence was pervasive in Roman art itself. The Roman state grew up on the fringes of the Hellenistic world. Greek styles and imagery had shaped the development of ancient Italian art at least as far back as the sixth century BC. During the Hellenistic period, the city of Rome grew to dominate Italy, coming into contact (and conflict) with the Greek colonies of southern Italy and then the Greek kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean. By the end of the second century BC, it had built an empire that encompassed much of the Mediterranean, including Spain, mainland Greece, and part of Asia Minor. Romans became consumers of art on a vast scale, developing a taste for Greek art alongside many other aspects of Greek culture and employing artists of Greek origin or training. In the centuries that followed, although art continued to evolve and served new purposes, the repertoire of Roman styles and imagery remained thoroughly indebted to the traditions of the Greek past.[40] In a sense, therefore, Roman art was a continuation of Hellenistic art in new circumstances.

This raises a problem when it comes to identifying possible classical models for Gandharan art. Many Gandharan sculptures resemble Roman works, but this does not definitively prove that their artists were looking to Rome for ideas rather than to earlier Greek traditions. Greek precedents can be cited for practically everything we encounter in the art of the Roman Empire! Consider, for example, the *putti* – the little boys with garlands that are so common in Gandharan sculpture (Figs. 23 and 24). There are numerous examples of very similar imagery in the Roman art, so at first sight it seems obvious that Rome is the source of the motif. Yet these playful figures, inspired by Eros/Cupid, the child of the love-goddess Aphrodite/Venus, were originally invented in the Hellenistic period. So are we, in fact, seeing contemporary Roman and Gandharan artists drawing independently upon a shared Greek heritage rooted in the Hellenistic period? According to this view, Gandharan sculpture and Roman sculpture are merely artistic ‘cousins’ with a common Greek ancestry.[41]

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[40] On the development of Roman imperial art in a Greek context and the problem of the identity of Roman art see e.g. Brendel (1979); Hölscher (2004); Stewart (forthcoming).
[41] Marshall (1945), 121.

The 'hellenocentric' (Greek-centred) argument has tended to dominate much of the discussion of Gandharan art. It is sometimes used as a default explanation, even when authors admit the relevance of the Roman Empire: why bring Rome into it if a Greek origin is possible? For some, the fact that Gandharan artists were orientated towards the Roman Empire is a mere technicality, since the population of the eastern empire was Greek-speaking and Roman art fundamentally Hellenistic in origin.[42] In fact, the word 'Hellenistic' is sometimes used as a flexible, catch-all term for anything that was ultimately descended from Greek culture, even centuries after the end of the Hellenistic period proper. The risk of this approach, however, is that it overlooks the specific historical circumstances in which Gandharan art developed, its global context.

The Roman Empire was an enormous political, economic, and cultural presence in the world of the first, second, and third centuries AD. By the middle of this period its direct rule extended from modern Scotland to Egypt and Iraq. There is abundant evidence for Roman trade with southern India, the tax revenues from which bankrolled a large proportion of Roman state expenditure.[43] There is less surviving evidence of trade contacts with Kushan Gandhara, but enough clues from ancient literature, numismatics, and archaeology to suggest that it existed (principally by sea) and was significant. The famous 'palatial' site at Begram in Afghanistan gives a vivid glimpse of how far luxury artefacts could travel through long-distance trade, for more than two hundred Roman objects were found there, though the site is unique and it is risky to generalize from it (Fig. 55).[44] There is also some evidence of diplomatic contacts between the Roman emperors and the Kushans, perhaps fostered by their shared interest in the common enemy between them – the Parthian Empire.[45] These were distant and weak links, and they do not by themselves

Figure 55. Small plaster relief of a youth (22.3 cm high) from the hoard at Begram, c. first century AD.



[42] E.g. Boardman (1994), 109-45; Boardman (1996), 280.

[43] On trade with South and Central Asia and discussions of tax revenue see McLaughlin (2014); McLaughlin (2016); Graf (2017). Note also Wheeler (1949) 13-16. Ball (2000) deals with many aspects of the Roman Empire's place within Asia.

[44] Whitehouse (1989); Mairs (2012); Morris (2021).

[45] Thorley (1979); Graf (2017), esp. 492. On Romano-Kushan contacts in general see Rosenfield (1967); McLaughlin (2016), 84-9.

explain the Graeco-Roman aspect of Gandharan art, but they may have helped create the conditions in which artistic exchange was possible. The thorough understanding of the principles of classical art exhibited by Gandharan artists suggests that the movement of artists themselves from the Roman Empire to Gandhara, perhaps employed to execute influential and prestigious commissions, may have been the main vehicle of influence.[46] In any case, nowadays most experts assume that the transfer of Roman ideas and skills is at least part of the history of Gandharan art.

This artistic transfer manifests itself at a time when the patrons of Buddhist art in Gandhara wanted to convert their worldly wealth meritoriously into durable monuments of their devotion. This was not a new practice. It had happened in various parts of India, at Mathura, Sanchi, Bharhut, Amaravati. However, the concentration of demand for such monuments in Kushan Gandhara seems to have been unprecedented, and it would not be surprising if the sculptural boom under way at the same time in the Roman Mediterranean played a part in shaping Buddhist patrons' expectations and artists' responses to them. All of the examples of Graeco-Roman stylistic and iconographical influence on Gandhara which have been mentioned above could be illustrated with works of art produced in the Roman Empire within this period.

It is particularly striking that many Gandharan reliefs recall the structures, the compositions, and the specific figure-types encountered on Roman sarcophagi (Figs. 23 and 24; 29 and 30; 32 and 33; 36 and 37; 39 and 40; 45 and 46; 48 and 49; 56 and 57).[47] The taste for these elaborately carved marble coffins took off in the Roman Empire in the first half of the second century AD. They were produced for aristocratic and affluent 'middle class' Romans both in Italy and in other urbanized areas of the Mediterranean. The main production centres were at Rome itself (using Carrara marble), Athens, and the quarries of western Asia Minor (Turkey). Customers in the Roman capital sometimes imported



Figure 56. Lid of a Roman marble sarcophagus with scenes of the birth and infancy of the god Dionysus/ Bacchus, c. AD 190, found at the 'Licinian Tomb' in Rome. Note the tree and archway which structure the scene in a manner reminiscent of Gandharan stair-riser reliefs such as Fig. 57.

[46] Soper (1951), 305; Stewart (2020), 80-1.
[47] On Roman sarcophagi in general see Koch (1993); Zanker and Ewald (2012).



Figure 57. Gandharan schist stair-riser reliefs from Jamalgarhi. Note the similarity of format and compositions and figures to Roman sarcophagus lids such as that in Figure 56.

them from distant parts of the Empire and those made in Asia Minor were also exported widely in the Near East. As we have seen, there is a marked resemblance between the erotes-and-garland friezes on the latter and the equivalent Gandharan reliefs. Other Gandharan works more closely resemble Roman metropolitan sarcophagi, including those with mythological scenes. It is possible (but unprovable) that the sarcophagus carvers themselves provided some of the inspiration for Gandharan artists. Certainly, some of the compositional similarities between the Roman and Gandharan reliefs are very remarkable. It is important to remember, however, that Roman marble sarcophagi survive much better than many other kinds of Roman art (it has been estimated that around 12,000 to 15,000 are extant[48]), and we need not regard them as direct models for Gandharan art, but maybe rather as proxies for a larger and more varied spectrum of Roman art and artists to which the Gandharan craftsmen were exposed, whether directly or indirectly.[49]

Gandharan Art in its Asian Contexts

Whether we regard the classical impact on Gandharan art as a 'Greek' phenomenon, or a 'Roman' phenomenon, or both, the evidence surveyed in this book suggests a remarkable cultural exchange between west and east. Yet we should be cautious about describing this in over-simplified language: the comparison is laden with anachronistic, modern associations. We like to think in terms of binary contrasts: Greek and Buddhist; east and west; classical and Asian. While recognizing the unique importance of the classical world for the history of Gandharan

[48] Koch (1993), 1.
[49] For this argument note Pearson (2010); Stewart (2020), 71-2.

Hadda, near Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan, is one of the most remarkable sites of the Greater Gandhara region. Its famous sculptures in stucco and clay include some of the best and most interesting Buddhist works to survive from between the second and fifth centuries, a period during which the tradition of Gandharan stone sculpture was largely superseded by modelling of figures in clay and stucco – often quite crude but sometimes skilful and elaborate (Figs 21, 43). Because Hadda is so well known, there has been a tendency to attribute unprovenanced stucco and clay works to this origin, but such provenances should sometimes be treated with caution.

Hadda is actually a cluster of monastic sites of differing dates. As elsewhere, their sculptures were used to adorn stupas and shrines. Many thousands of sculptures were discovered in French and Afghan archaeological campaigns in the 1920s and 1970s, latterly under the direction of Zemaryalai Tarzi, at which point Afghanistan's descent into war led to extensive damage to the remains. Some of the sculptures of Hadda are astonishingly close to Graeco-Roman models. This is a relatively late flowering of Graeco-Roman conventions in Gandhara, for classical naturalism seems to have been favoured by artists and patrons at Hadda even while it was diminishing in the sculpture of the Roman west.

art, in recent decades scholars have also emphasized the other cultural influences that contributed to the appearance of Gandharan art: the various styles of Bactria and Parthia; the royal imagery of the Kushan rulers; the Buddhist art of India; and the imagery of religions other than Buddhism: Zoroastrianism and ancient Hinduism.[50] We still have much to learn about all of these connections. None of them, however, can be said to *explain* Gandharan art. Gandhara was not an empty vessel waiting to be filled by cultural traditions from other parts of the ancient world. It was, rather, a place of remarkable artistic innovation for the purposes of religious faith. The intense visual creativity of Gandhara had a profound and enduring impact on the wider traditions of art in Asia.

Gandhara was one of the heartlands of the ancient Buddhist world. It was distinguished by a concentration of Buddhist communities, important contributions to religious literature and thought, the artistic inventions considered in this book, and an almost legendary significance in ancient Buddhists' view of their own history (Foucher called the region 'a

[50] Nehru (1989) surveys the main potential contributory influences, and on the cosmopolitan environment see Luczanits (2008a) and various contributions in Luczanits (2008b). Falser (2015) esp. 35-46 discusses the post-partition shift to pluralistic, 'internationalist' views of Gandharan art, e.g. in various works of Maurizio Taddei.

second holy land' of Buddhism).[51] It is unsurprising, therefore, that artistic ideas developed first for the shrines of Gandhara recurred again and again in new forms throughout pre-Islamic Central Asia and in Gupta India of the fourth to sixth centuries. Moreover, the development of Chinese Buddhist art in its earliest surviving forms was strongly shaped by Gandharan visual traditions, which in some form survived much later on, in Buddhist art all the way across East Asia (Figs. 16 and 58).[52] It is very unlikely that the ancient users and views of such imagery had any notion of its ancestry in the art of the Graeco-Roman west – it is the privilege of modern art historians to be able to detect such global connections across periods and cultures.



Figure 58. Gilt bronze statuette of a seated Buddha, c. second to third century AD(?).

[51] Foucher (1905-1951), vol. 2, 416-7.

[52] On the general impact of Gandharan Buddhist art: Foucher (1905-1951), vol. 2.2, 597-673; Behrendt (2022). On connections with earliest Buddhist art in China: Rhie (1999-2010).

Chapter 3

Gandharan Art Today

The Heritage of Gandharan Art

Gandharan art was the product of a relatively small region in antiquity, but its characteristics help to explain why it became famous in the history of world art, and why it is as popular as ever today. In the past, the concern with the spread of Greek tradition to Asia was a largely western preoccupation, with Eurocentric and imperialist undertones, but today there is a very international fascination with Gandharan art as a cosmopolitan tradition. Perhaps the wide cultural horizons of artists in ancient Gandhara chime with our sensitivity to modern globalization.[1] The region has also been treated as part of the so-called ancient Silk Road, which is symbolically so relevant to China's modern economic initiatives towards Central Asia and Pakistan: the Silk Road has a strong political resonance. At any rate, the interest in Gandhara is truly global. In 2008-2010 a landmark touring exhibition in Germany attracted more than 40,000 visitors, while Gandhara has featured to a greater or lesser degree in numerous 'silk road' shows across East and South-East Asia. Gandharan art has also taken on new meanings. For example, there has been a resurgence of interest among many Buddhists in parts of Asia, and the growing phenomenon of religious tourism to the Gandharan sites has been strategically encouraged by the government of Pakistan.[2]

The German exhibition was entitled, *Gandhara: das buddhistische Erbe Pakistans* ('Gandhara: The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan'). Within Pakistan itself, and more widely in South Asia, this has sometimes been a contentious heritage. On the one hand, the pre-Islamic archaeology of Pakistan has officially been cherished and promoted since the state's creation in 1947 (Fig. 59).[3] On the other hand, those protecting and researching this heritage have sometimes struggled against indifference

[1] Compare Falser (2015), 46-51.
[2] See e.g. Zhang (2018), with reference to China's 'Belt and Road' initiative 136; K. Ali, 'Setting up of Gandhara Cultural Authority on the cards', *Dawn* 16 July 2020 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1764934> (last consulted 7 September 2023); Bhatti (2022), 166. At the time of writing the Pakistan National Assembly has recently passed a 'Promotion and Protection of Gandhara Culture Authority Act 2023' to preserve and promote Buddhist sites and tourism (*Dawn* 2 August 2023 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1767887>.
[3] Dar (2004), 9. On the subtleties of this promotion in museums see Amstutz (2019); Amstutz (2022); Bhatti (2022), esp. 163-6.

and even hostility towards archaeological remains.[4] A more serious challenge is the effort of education and engagement required to combat illegal trade in artefacts and casual destruction of sites. This is to say nothing of the (few) high-profile occasions of extremist violence against ancient Buddhist art, during the Taliban occupation of the Swat Valley in 2007 (Fig. 60) or, in Afghanistan, the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001: events which in turn have encouraged the elevation of Gandharan culture as a symbol of peace and cultural exchange.[5]



Figure 59. Archaeological Heritage of Pakistan Rs. 7 postage stamps, Pakistan 1999.

That a modern nation state has the right and obligation to treat its archaeology as an inheritance should be uncontroversial. But the term 'heritage' can be loaded with multiple layers of political and ideological significance. It is often taken to imply a spiritual connection with the cultures of the past, so the ownership of heritage is more than just a legal

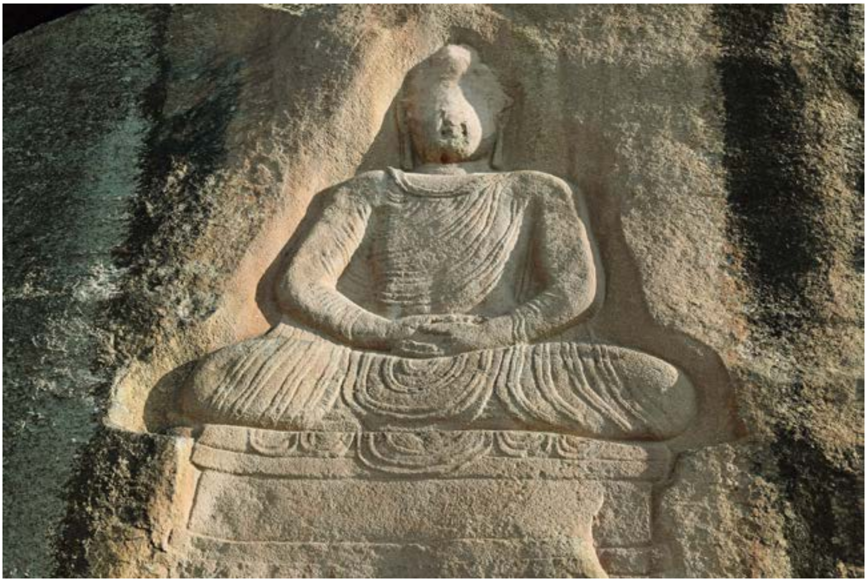


Figure 60. The sixth- to seventh-century Jahanabad Buddha after it had been damaged with explosives by the Taliban, targeted as an idol, September 2007; in this image the damage to the face has been consolidated for conservation.

4 Bhatti (2022), 170.
5 Falser (2015), 46-51; Bhatti (2022), 165. On Bamiyan: Morgan (2012).

matter. It is also implicated in ideas of modern nationhood. The partition of India in 1947 resulted in the division of ancient Buddhist archaeology into two modern states. The outstanding collection of Gandharan art in the Lahore Museum was literally divided between the two, with almost half of the sculptures being allocated to India, to be preserved in the new museum at Chandigarh.[6] Yet cultural heritage resides as much in people's minds as in objects and cannot be so easily divided – sometimes only shared, or disputed. With partition, Gandhara proper ceased to be the territory of modern India, but as part of *ancient* India it continued to have a strong contemporary relevance to Indians' perception of their own national heritage and artistic story. The slippage in the position of Gandharan art between ancient India and modern India/Pakistan is a locus of friction.

All of this is to say that ancient art is not only a matter of obscure ancient meanings which the archaeologist must try to decipher: it is also invested with modern significance and is subject to continual 'reinvention' and conflicting interpretations.

Collecting, Forgeries, and Provenance

This small book has raised some big questions about the character and affinities of Gandharan art. We are now better placed than ever to answer such questions because of the wealth of information which continues to emerge from excavations, archaeological surveys, new catalogues and analyses of discoveries, not only in the Gandharan region but also in the Graeco-Roman lands and other parts of Asia. Much exciting investigation is taking place in Pakistan, through both strategic and 'rescue' excavation, archaeological surveys, and conservation work.[7] On the other hand, a lot of information has already been irredeemably forgotten because of the circumstances in which evidence was unearthed and dispersed. Even by the standards of their time, some of the earlier excavations were no more than expeditions to retrieve art-objects. As in other parts of the world, even much more modern archaeological projects have sometimes been undermined by poor methodology or lack of publication. This has resulted in a loss of evidence and lack of data about the findspots

[6] Bhatti (2022), 163.

[7] Note e.g. the recent official investigations at the sites at Abba Sahib Cheena, Bahu Dheri and Bhamala. Some information on recent work is released on the website of the Directorate for Archaeology and Museums for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province < https://directorate_of_archaeology_museums.kp.gov.pk> (last consulted 11 September 2023). The work of the Italian Archaeological Mission is prolific; for an overview of their past contributions see Callieri (2006). For an overview of both foreign and Pakistani projects from 1947 to 1997 see Dar (2004).

of discoveries.[8] The objects themselves are largely unpublished because of the enormous resources that would be required to document the huge numbers of items in the reserve collections of museums, though digitization projects are now helping to rectify the problem.[9]

However, by far the greatest loss has resulted from the unofficial and unrecorded discovery of artefacts. Almost as soon as Gandharan sculptures started to attract attention in the nineteenth century they were in demand as souvenirs for westerners.[10] Aside from the systematic 'looting' of particular sites, the high volume of sculptural decoration in the soil of the Peshawar Basin created a steady supply of small antiquities, some of them perhaps merely casual discoveries on agricultural land, which found their way into private hands through individual sellers. The bazaar of Peshawar has always been a source of surfaced antiquities. Modern legislation and attempts to protect the archaeological heritage of Pakistan have not been able to prevent the illicit sale and export of Gandharan art, which has been thriving for generations: the scale of the challenge is immense. The consequence is that much of the Gandharan sculpture in circulation today resides in private collections or on the international antiquities market, which is fuelled in turn by collecting, especially in Europe, America, and Japan. Furthermore, many collections in public museums were ultimately derived from such private sources. For example, numerous objects in museum collections in the United Kingdom were donated by the families of British soldiers and officials who had served on the North-West Frontier.

Knowledge about archaeological contexts does not always produce easy answers to our questions about Gandharan art. Yet there is no doubt that the extent of our ignorance about the provenance of so many Gandharan artefacts has made efforts to understand this tradition very much more difficult.[11] An additional problem is closely related. Since the beginning of international enthusiasm for Gandharan art, the demand generated by collectors has encouraged not only digging and smuggling, but also forgery. Doubt has been cast even on old acquisitions in museum collections and there are suspicions that regular forgery began as early

[8] See Olivieri *et al.* (2022), 67-8.

[9] Note particularly the DiGA (Digitization of Gandharan Artefacts) project at Ruhr Universität Bochum, which has been documenting sculptures from around Chakdara and Saidu Sharif, as well as establishing standards for databases of Gandharan material: < https://diga.ceres.rub.de/en/>.

[10] See e.g. Khan (2022).

[11] Besides the sculpture mainly discussed here, note the example of a silver cup explored by Chippindale and Gill (2000), 489-90.

as the 1930s.[12] However, the quantity of fake Gandharan sculptures has grown dramatically over the last fifty years.[13]

Little is understood about the contemporary industry in Gandharan forgeries outside law-enforcement circles, though anecdotal information about the practices of forgers circulates among archaeologists and the fake objects can be illuminating in themselves. For obvious reasons there has been no academic research on the forgers in this region. By common consent, some of the 'Gandharan' works of art that have circulated on the antiquities market are preposterous modern fakes (which does not prevent them from finding buyers). Some of them are betrayed by profound misunderstandings of the methods of ancient sculptors. Some of them simply *look* freshly manufactured or use materials unavailable in the Gandharan region. In some cases they directly copy published works (forgers' workshops are said to be well stocked with illustrated books and catalogues of Gandharan sculpture). But often there is no consensus about the authenticity of works and experts may be reluctant to 'de-authenticate' objects, as this could have serious legal and financial implications for all involved. There are few scientific means to help with assessing authenticity. It is usually a matter of art-historical judgement on the basis of comparison with demonstrably genuine works. There are grounds for caution about Gandharan sculptures that look 'too good to be true' or which seem designed to appeal to collectors' desires: rare or unique narratives; scenes which look strikingly classical, such as 'Dionysiac' scenes; or erotic imagery. Yet sculptures with more common subjects may be just as problematic. Conversely, genuinely ancient works could appear strange and unusual. Care should be taken with objects which do not have a lengthy, reliably recorded collection history.[14] Yet, as we have seen, even more venerable collections were not immune from deception.

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[12] Martina Stoye, personal communication, May 2020.

[13] For research around modern Gandharan forgeries see Srikureja (2017); Tanabe (1988); Bhandare (2022) on coins. Gupta (2019) deals with smuggled antiquities and fakes from India but is very relevant.

[14] The UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, of November 1970, is often regarded as a significant cut-off point in judgements about the provenance of antiquities, because it formalized an international understanding of the problem of antiquities smuggling and illegal excavations and set expectations for future conduct. However, this does not mean that an antiquity in circulation before 1970 is 'innocent'. The convention has so far gradually been ratified by 143 countries: <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and> (last accessed 12 September 2023).

The prevalence of forgeries has a significant intellectual impact.[15] The fakes may collectively influence our impression of the character of Gandharan art, and more importantly, individual fakes have entered academic discussion, particularly when they have become part of the collections of major museums. A further complication is that the smuggling of illicit antiquities and the smuggling of forgeries are closely associated with each other. On occasions authorities have intercepted consignments of both, with the result that authentic and fake items have been preserved or repatriated together, entering official collections even in Pakistan itself.[16]

Dealers in antiquities are rarely as diligent as they should be in questioning both the authenticity and the origins of Gandharan artefacts. Genuineness and legitimacy are sometimes assumed by default: innocent until proven guilty. There has also been a tendency to justify the export of antiquities from the region by imagining that the artefacts originated not in Pakistan but in conflict-torn Afghanistan, and that they have in some sense been 'saved' by foreign collectors.[17] There is no easy solution to the problems described here, except for a critical perspective and a respect for the knowledge generated by careful, rigorous archaeological research.

15 See e.g. Chippendale and Gill (2000), 494-6.
16 See e.g. Khan and Saeed (2022).
17 Chippindale and Gill (2000), 468.

Further Reading and Resources

Introductory Reading

Only a few reliable non-specialist books have been written about the general subject of Gandharan art. Among these Behrendt (2007) is especially clear and accessible, and is available online. Giuliano (2010) is a catalogue of the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, with an introduction (15-48) that encapsulates the subject for Italian readers. Similarly, Zwalf (1996) is a very scholarly catalogue of the huge British Museum Gandharan collection but its introductory chapters (11-76) offer an excellent, concise and authoritative overview of the whole subject. Luczanits (2008b) is a landmark catalogue with interesting short essays in German covering a range of relevant subjects. A very small number of English copies were printed under the title *Gandhara: The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan*, but these are rare. They are not to be confused with the shorter catalogue of the exhibition's American version, Prosser (2011), which is nevertheless also very useful. Bussagli (1965) is a significant, complex and thought-provoking introduction, in Italian with a later French translation.

Lo Muzio (2017) is an excellent, critical introduction to pre-Islamic archaeology in Central Asia, though not specifically about Gandhara. Harmatta (1994), while a little outdated now, offers a useful online synthesis of Central Asian history and archaeology in the relevant period. Behrendt (2004) is focused on Gandharan architecture and its dating, but constitutes a very helpful general account of the monastic contexts of Gandharan art.

General Works and Reference

Once again, Zwalf (1996) has a value as a reference work that goes far beyond its purpose as a British Museum catalogue. Tissot (2002) offers a magnificent overview of Gandharan art with line-drawings representing its iconographical repertoire. Similarly, Faccenna and Filigenzi (2007) presents a large repertoire of Gandharan imagery and architecture with standard terminology for describing it. Kurita (2003) is an extremely useful compendium of Gandharan imagery, particularly good for scenes of the Buddha's life/lives, but it combines museum collections with objects in private hands or on the antiquities

market, with the potential problems that entails. Ingholt (1957) is an old, brilliantly illustrated repertoire of examples based on Pakistan museum collections. For a huge array of examples of Graeco-Roman imagery, organized by gods and mythological characters, consult the multi-volume visual encyclopedia *LIMC* – the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (1981-2009). For the bibliography of post-partition research on Gandharan art, besides the online resources mentioned below, see Dar (2004), 24-34.

Although it has been superseded in many respects by decades of subsequent research, Foucher (1905-1951) remains a stimulating and magisterial account of all aspects of Gandharan Buddhist art and its relationship with Graeco-Roman traditions.

Databases and Websites

The present publication has its origins in the Gandhara Connections project at Oxford University, which created an online hub of resources for the study of this subject: <https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections>. The site includes links to online workshop proceedings, many video recordings of lectures and talks, and short introductory essays on various topics. It also hosts the Gandharan Art Bibliography (GAB), with downloadable references arranged thematically: <www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections/bibliography>. A useful, annotated reading list can also be found online on Oxford Bibliographies (see 'Gandharan Art' by A. Amato) <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780195393521-0256>.

The DiGA project at Bochum <https://diga.ceres.rub.de/en/> and the Image Gandhāra project at Sydney <https://gandhari-texts.sydney.edu.au/collections/gandhari-inscribed-buddhas> promise to become important hubs for accessing Gandharan material online. Some beautiful resources are already on the Digital Gandhara site <https://digitalgandhara.com/>. The site <https://gandhari.org/> by Stefan Baums and Andrew Glass is a key resource for the study of Gandhari texts and language, including inscriptions on stone.

Open Access Publications

Academic studies of Gandharan art and archaeology are increasingly being published online with free access. The Gandhara Connections project has produced a series of open access volumes, including

collections of papers based on its international workshops: Rienjang and Stewart (2018); Rienjang and Stewart (2019); Rienjang and Stewart (2020); Rienjang and Stewart (2022); Rienjang and Stewart (2023). The edited volumes give a representative sense of current scholarship on a range of topics.

It should be noted that many older Gandharan publications are now freely available online through resources such as Google Books <https://books.google.com>, the Internet Archive <https://archive.org/>, the Toyo Bunko Digital Archive of rare books <http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/index.html.ja>, and the website of the Archaeological Survey of India <https://indianculture.gov.in/rarebooks>. Many other publications have been put online informally by their authors, on the <www.academia.edu> website or <www.researchgate.net> , so it is always worth searching for titles on the web. For individual or institutional subscribers to JStor <www.jstor.org> a large array of further publications in academic journals is available online.

Catalogues

Online coverage of Gandharan collections in museums is patchy and rather unstable, though a growing number of (particularly) American Museums offer excellent online databases with open access images of high quality (notably the Metropolitan Museum of Art <www.metmuseum.org>). Google Arts & Culture covers some Pakistani and Indian collections with excellent imagery, including the Lahore Museum (<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/lahore-museum>) and the Indian Museum in Kolkata (<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/indian-museum-kolkata>). Some of the largest international collections of Gandharan art are listed below with selected published catalogues (in some cases museum websites provide further coverage): British Museum, London (Zwalf [1996]); Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh (Paul [2002]); Indian Museum, Kolkata (Das and Sengupta [1991]); Lahore Museum (Alam [1998]); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Behrendt [2007]); Musée Guimet, Paris (Hackin [1923]); Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale 'Giuseppe Tucci', Rome (Giuliano [2010]); Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (Yaldiz [2000]); National Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul (Tissot [2006]); National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi (*Gandhara Sculpture* [1964]); Peshawar Museum (Ali and Zahir [2005]); Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Jongeward [2003]); Taxila Museum (Khan [2005]); Tokyo National Museum; Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Ackermann [1975]).

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Figure 1. Map showing the locations of some of the major Gandharan sites of the Peshawar Valley (Dirk Fabian, ingraphis; copyright Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland).

Figure 2. Aerial view of the Sirkap site at Taxila, looking south (Copyright: Saiyu Travel Co. Ltd.).

Figure 3. So-called 'palette' or 'toilet-tray' in steatite, from Akra Mound, Bannu, c. first to second century AD. It is decorated with the classical iconography of the myth of Artemis and Aktaeon. London, British Museum inv. 1936,1223.1 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 4. Carnelian intaglio (carved seal-stone) showing Herakles. Found in Afghanistan and believed to have been made there, c. first to third century AD. London, British Museum inv. 1880.3544 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 5. Gandharan relief in schist showing monks venerating a stupa, c. second to third century AD. Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, inv. I 5760 (Photo: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst/ CC BY-SA 4.0).

Figure 6. View of the monastery of Takht-i-Bahi, looking north. The square structure in the nearest court is the base of the main stupa; the court immediately beyond became crowded with small stupas (Photo: Muhammad Zahir CC BY-SA 3.0 https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:General_View_of_Takht-i-Bahi_Site.JPG).

Figure 7. Steatite reliquary which contained miniature gold reliquaries, a charm, and coins of the Kushan emperor Vima Takto. From a stupa at Darunta, Afghanistan, c. second century AD. London, British Museum, inv. 1880.98 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 8. Schist reliefs from a Gandharan monument (stupa stair-risers?), c. first to second century AD. The scenes show dancing, drinking, and music with figures in varied dress. Cleveland, OH, Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. 1930.328 (Photo: Cleveland Museum of Art, CC0 licence).

Figure 9. Painted and gilded female head in stucco (with partial restorations), found at a Buddhist site at Rokhri, c. second to third century AD. Lahore Museum, inv. G-388 (Photo: Suzuki Kaku/ Alamy Stock Photo).

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Museum, inv. 1900,0209.1 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 13. Gold coin of the Emperor Kanishka from Ahin Posh near Jalalabad, Afghanistan, c. AD 127-150: reverse showing figure of the Buddha. London, British Museum, inv. IOC.289 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

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Figure 21. Clay sculpture of Herakles-Vajrapani attending the Buddha’s first sermon. From Niche V2, Tapa-e Shotor monastery, Hadda, Afghanistan, c. second half of second century AD? (destroyed 1992) (Photo: after of Tarzi [2000], pl. 2).

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Figure 26. Gandharan schist relief of Hariti and Panchika from Takht-i-Bahi, c. second to third century AD. Hariti's posture, the fruit-laden cornucopia, and the figure-hugging tunic falling from her right shoulder are all features of Graeco-Roman goddesses such as Tyche/Fortuna. London, British Museum, inv. 1950,0726.2 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 27. Gandharan schist relief showing Maya's dream, c. second century AD. She sleeps on a luxurious couch, accompanied by servants and guards. The elephant representing the future Buddha was carved on the now damaged nimbus (halo) above the queen. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 1976.402 (Photo: Metropolitan Museum, CC0 licence).

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Figure 30. Fragment of a Roman sarcophagus relief, c. late second century AD. Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. E000140 (Photo: copyright Museo Nacional del Prado).

Figure 31. Gandharan schist relief showing the young Siddhartha, the future Buddha, in an archery contest, assisted by a monkey, from Takht-i-Bahi, c. second to third century AD. London, British Museum, inv. 1900,0414.3 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 32. Gandharan relief showing the Great Departure of Siddhartha. From Loriyan Tangai, c. second to third century AD. Kolkata, Indian Museum (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London; CC BY-NC 3.0 licence).

Figure 33. Detail of Roman sarcophagus relief showing Jesus Christ's entry into Jerusalem. From the Vatican area of Rome, fourth century AD. Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Cristiano, inv. 31461. (Photo: University of Michigan Library: Art Images for College Teaching/Allan T. Kohl, CC0.)

Figure 34. Gandharan schist relief showing the Buddha's enlightenment beneath a pipal tree, c. second to third century AD. Washington, DC, National Museum of Asian Art, Washington DC, inv. F1949.9b. (Photo: courtesy of National Museum of Asian Art.)

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Figure 36. Gandharan schist relief showing the death (the Mahaparinirvana) of the Buddha, c. second to third century AD. Found in the Gandhara region c. late nineteenth century. It appears to have belonged to the same stupa as Figure 28. Note Vajrapani at the left of the scene. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. EAOS.10 (Photo: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

Figure 37. Roman marble sarcophagus with representation of a young girl's death-bed and mourners. Later second century AD. London, British Museum, inv. 1805,0703.144 (Photo:

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Figure 38. Gandharan schist relief showing the *Dipankara-jataka*, c. second to third century AD. Lahore Museum, inv. 586 (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London; CC BY-NC 3.0 licence).

Figure 39. Gandharan relief of the Shibi-jataka, c. second century AD. London, British Museum, inv. 1912,1221.1 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 40. Drawing of the punishment of Marsyas scene on the side of a Roman sarcophagus in the Palazzo Doria Pamphilij, Rome. From the Via Aurelia at Rome, c. AD 230. (Image: after Robert (1904), pl. 67; copyright Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Open Access <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/asr3_2/0236>.)

Figure 41. Major-General Sir Alexander Cunningham (c. 1885) seated with sculptures from Jamalgarhi. (Photo: courtesy of Leiden University Libraries, P-043.600/ Box 468.)

Figure 42. Alexander Caddy's photography of 1896, documenting recently discovered sculptures at Loriyan Tangai. London, British Library, Shelfmark: Photo 1003/(1042 (courtesy of the British Library Board).

Figure 43. Painted stucco head of a monk, probably from Hadda in Afghanistan, c. fourth to fifth century AD. It would have been part of a larger Buddhist narrative scene. The realism of the facial features is close to Hellenistic Greek and Roman portraiture. London, British Museum, inv. 1978,0306.1 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 44. Detail of a grieving follower of the Buddha from a Gandharan schist relief showing part of the Mahaparinirvana, c. second- to third-century AD. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. IS.7-1948 (Photo: copyright Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

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Figure 46. Gandharan stair-riser relief of standing figures, from Takht-i-Bahi. London, British Museum, inv. 1900,0414.13 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 47. Small (18 cm high) Gandharan schist relief of Hariti and Panchika, c. second to third century AD. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. EA1962.42 (Photo: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

Figure 48. Gandharan schist relief with scene of the 'Wooden Horse', from Hund, c. second century AD. London, British Museum, inv. OA 1990.10-13.1 (Photo: copyright The Trustees of the British Museum; shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0] licence).

Figure 49. Detail of a Roman marble sarcophagus lid with scenes from the Trojan War, c. late second century AD. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. AHMichaelis.111 (Photo: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford).

Figure 50. Silver coin (tetradrachm) of Menander I. The obverse (front) of the coin shows the king's head in profile, wearing a helmet and diadem; the Greek inscription reads 'of the saviour king Menander'. The reverse shows a traditional standing figure of the

goddess Athena with the Gandhari inscription (in kharoshthi script) ‘of the saviour great king [maharaja] Menander’. New York, American Numismatic Society, inv. 1995.51.125 (Photo: ANS, Public Domain Mark).

Figure 51. Limestone funerary stele (gravestone) with relief of a youth wearing a cloak, from the cemetery of Ai Khanoum, c. third to second century BC. Kabul, National Museum of Afghanistan, inv. MK 05.42.15. (Photo: H. Sinica, CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://flic.kr/p/2hJooGb>.)

Figure 52. Miniature gold figure with turquoise inlay, used to adorn the body of a woman in Tillya Tepe Tomb 6, c. mid first century AD. Kabul, National Museum of Afghanistan, inv. MK 04.40.9. (Photo: H. Sinica, CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://flic.kr/p/2hJkG5a>.)

Figure 53. Painted clay sculpture of a warrior, from a battle scene in the palatial hall at Khalchayan, Uzbekistan, first century BC. Termez, Archaeological Museum (Photo: Nicoletta Stofkoper, CC0 Universal licence).

Figure 54. Schist relief in the ‘drawing style’ from the stupa frieze at Saidu Sharif I, c. 50s-60s AD. Part of scene of the gift of the elephant to Siddhartha. Swat Museum, inv. S 1112 (Photo: copyright Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan/Luca M. Olivieri).

Figure 55. Small plaster relief of a youth (22.3 cm high) from the hoard at Begram, c. first century AD. Kabul, National Museum of Afghanistan, inv. MK 04.1.17 (Photo: Marco Prins, CC0 1.0 Universal licence).

Figure 56. Lid of a Roman marble sarcophagus with scenes of the birth and infancy of the god Dionysus/Bacchus, c. AD 190, found at the ‘Licinian Tomb’ in Rome. Note the tree and archway which structure the scene in a manner reminiscent of Gandharan stair-riser reliefs such as Fig. 57. Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, inv. 23.31 (Photo: Walters Art Museum, CC0 licence).

Figure 57. Gandharan schist stair-riser reliefs from Jamalgarhi. Note the similarity of format and compositions and figures to Roman sarcophagus lids such as that in Figure 56. Peshawar Museum (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London; CC BY-NC 3.0 licence).

Figure 58. Gilt bronze statuette of a seated Buddha, c. second to third century AD(?). Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums, inv. 1943.53.80.A (Photo: copyright the President and Fellows of Harvard College).

Figure 59. Archaeological Heritage of Pakistan Rs. 7 postage stamps, Pakistan 1999 (Photo: courtesy of Stampex Indian Stamp Company).

Figure 60. The sixth- to seventh-century Jahanabad Buddha after it had been damaged with explosives by the Taliban, targeted as an idol, September 2007; in this image the damage to the face has been consolidated for conservation (Photo: Yusra.Amin 123 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buddhist_rock_carvings,_Manglawar,_Pakistan.jpg, image licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence).



In the early centuries AD, the small region of Gandhara (centred on what is now northern Pakistan) produced an extraordinary tradition of Buddhist art which eventually had an immense influence across Asia. Mainly produced to adorn monasteries and shrines, Gandharan sculptures celebrate the Buddha himself, the stories of his life and the many sacred characters of the Buddhist cosmos. Since this imagery was rediscovered in the nineteenth century, one of its most fascinating and puzzling aspects is the extent to which it draws on the conventions of Greek and Roman art, which originated thousands of kilometres to the west.

Inspired by the Gandhara Connections project at Oxford University's Classical Art Research Centre, this book offers an introduction to Gandharan art and the mystery of its relationship with the Graeco-Roman world of the Mediterranean. It presents an accessible explanation of the ancient and modern contexts of Gandharan art, the state of scholarship on the subject, and guidance for further, in-depth study.

Peter Stewart is Director of the Classical Art Research Centre and Professor of Ancient Art at the University of Oxford. A specialist in Roman sculpture, he has devoted much of his research to the spread of the classical artistic tradition in and beyond the provinces of the Roman Empire. His publications include *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response* (2003), *The Social History of Roman Art* (2008) and, together with Wannaporn Rienjang, the edited volumes of the Gandhara Connections project.

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